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# THE HIRED BABY

WITH OTHER STORIES AND SOCIAL SKETCHES

BY

MARIE CORELLI,

AUTHOR OF "A ROMANCE OF TWO WORLDS," ETC.

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## THE HIRED BABY.

A ROMANCE OF THE LONDON STREETS.

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It was a dark, desolate December night—a night that clung to the metropolis like a wet black shroud,—a night in which the heavy, low-hanging vapours melted every now and then into a slow reluctant rain, cold as icicle drops in a rock-cavern. People passed and re-passed in the streets like ghosts in a bad dream; the yellow twinkling gaslight showed them at one moment rising out of the fog and then disappearing from view as though suddenly engulfed in a vaporous ebon sea. With muffled angry shrieks, the metropolitan trains deposited their shoals of shivering, coughing travellers at the several stations, where sleepy officials, rendered vicious by the inclement weather, snatched the tickets from their hands with offensive haste and roughness. Omnibus conductors grew ill-tempered and abusive without any seemingly adequate reason; shopkeepers

became flippant, disobliging, and careless of custom; cabmen shouted derisive or denunciatory language after their rapidly retreating fares; in short everybody was in a discontented, almost spiteful humour, with the exception of those few aggressively cheerful persons who are in the habit of always making the best of everything, even bad weather. Down the long wide vista of the Cromwell Road, Kensington, the fog had it all its own way; it swept on steadily, like thick smoke from a huge fire, choking the throats and blinding the eyes of foot-passengers, stealing through the crannies of the houses, and chilling the blood of even those luxurious individuals who, seated in elegant drawing-rooms before blazing fires, easily forgot that there were such bitter things as cold and poverty in that outside world against which they had barred their doors. At one house in particular—a house with gaudy painted doors and somewhat soiled yellow silk curtains at the windows—a house that plainly said of itself—"Done up for show!" to all who cared to examine its exterior—there stood a closed brougham drawn by a prancing pair of fat horses. A coachman of distinguished appearance sat on the box: a footman of irreproachable figure stood waiting on the pavement, his yellow-gloved hand resting elegantly on the polished silver knob of the carriage-door. Both these gentlemen were resolute and inflexible of face; they looked as if they had determined on some great

deed that should move the world to wild applause,—but, truth to tell, they had only just finished a highly satisfactory “meat-tea,” and, before this grave silence had fallen upon them, they had been discussing the advisability of broiled steak and onions for supper. The coachman had inclined to plain mutton-chops as being easier of digestion; the footman had earnestly asseverated his belief in the superior succulence and sweetness of the steak and onions, and in the end he had gained his point. This weighty question being settled they had gradually grown reflective on the past, present, and future joys of eating at some one else’s expense, and in this bland and pleasing state of meditation they were still absorbed. The horses were impatient, and pawed the muddy ground with many a toss of their long manes and tails, the steam from their glossy coats mingling with the ever-thickening density of the fog. On the white stone steps of the residence before which they waited, was an almost invisible bundle, apparently shapeless and immovable. Neither of the two gorgeous personages in livery observed it; it was too far back in a dim corner, too unobtrusive for the casual regard of their lofty eyes. Suddenly the painted doors before mentioned were thrown apart with a clattering noise; a warmth and radiance from the entrance-hall thus displayed streamed into the foggy street, and at the same instant the footman, still with grave and imperturbable countenance,

opened the brougham. An elderly lady, richly dressed, with diamonds sparkling in her grey hair, came rustling down the steps, bringing with her faint odours of patchouli and violet powder. She was followed by a girl of doll-like prettiness with a snub nose and petulant little mouth, who held up her satin and lace skirts with a sort of fastidious disdain as though she scorned to set foot on earth that was not carpeted with the best velvet pile. As they approached their carriage, the inert dark bundle crouched in the corner started into life,—a woman with wild hair and wilder eyes,—whose pale lips quivered with suppressed weeping as her piteous voice broke into sudden clamour:

“Oh lady!” she cried, “for the love of God a trifle! Oh lady, lady!”

But the “lady” with a contemptuous sniff and a shake of her scented garments passed her before she could continue her appeal, and she turned with a sort of faint hope to the softer face of the girl.

“Oh, my dear, *do* have pity! Just the smallest little thing, and God will bless you! You are rich and happy,—and I am starving! Only a penny! For the baby—the poor little baby!” and she made as though she would open her tattered shawl and reveal some treasure hidden therein, but shrank back repelled by the cold merciless gaze that fell upon her from those eyes in which youth dwelt without tenderness.

"You have no business on our door-step," said the girl harshly. "Go away directly, or I shall tell my servant to call a policeman."

Then, as she entered the brougham after her mother, she addressed the respectable footman angrily, giving him the benefit of a strong nasal intonation.

"Howard, why do you let such dirty beggars come near the carriage? What are you paid for I should like to know? It is perfectly disgraceful to the house!"

"Very sorry, miss!" said the footman gravely; "I didn't see the—the person before." Then shutting the brougham door, he turned with a dignified air to the unfortunate creature who still lingered near, and with a sweeping gesture of his gold-embroidered coat sleeve, said majestically:

"Do you 'ear? Be hoff!"

Then having thus performed his duty, he mounted the box beside his friend the coachman, and the equipage rattled quickly away, its gleaming lights soon lost in the smoke-laden vapours that drooped downwards like funeral hangings from the invisible sky to the scarcely visible ground. Left to herself, the woman who had vainly sought charity from those in whom no charity existed, looked up despairingly as one distraught, and seemed as though she would have given vent to some fierce exclamation, when a feeble wail came pitifully forth from the sheltering folds of her shawl. She

restrained herself instantly and walked on at a rapid pace, scarcely heeding whither she went, till she reached the Catholic church known as the "Oratory." Its unfinished *façade* loomed darkly out of the fog; there was nothing picturesque or inviting about it, yet there were people passing softly in and out, and through the swinging to and fro of the red baize-covered doors there came a comforting warm glimmer of light. The woman paused, hesitated,—and then having apparently made up her mind, ascended the broad steps, looked in and finally entered. The place was strange to her;—she knew nothing of its religious meaning, and its cold uncompleted appearance oppressed her. There were only some half dozen persons scattered about like black specks in its vast white interior, and the fog hung heavily in the vaulted dome and dark little chapels. One corner alone blazed with brilliancy and colour;—this was the Altar of the Virgin. Towards it the tired vagrant made her way, and on reaching it sank on the nearest chair as though exhausted. She did not raise her eyes to the marble splendours of the shrine,—one of the masterpieces of old Italian art; she had been merely attracted to the spot by the glitter of the lamps and candles, and took no thought as to the reason of their being lit, though she was sensible of a certain comfort in the soft lustre shed around her. She seemed still young; her face, rendered haggard by long and

bitter privation, showed traces of past beauty, and her eyes, full of feverish trouble, were large, dark, and still lustrous. Her mouth alone,—that sensitive betrayer of the life's good and bad actions,—revealed that all had not been well with her; its lines were hard and vicious, and the resentful curve of the upper lip spoke of foolish pride not unmixed with reckless sensuality. She sat for a minute or two motionless,—then with exceeding care and tenderness she began to unfold her thin torn shawl by gentle degrees, looking down with anxious solicitude at the object concealed within it. Only a baby,—and withal a baby so tiny and white and frail, that it seemed as though it must melt like a snow-flake beneath the lightest touch. As its wrappings were loosened, it opened a pair of large, solemn blue eyes and gazed at the woman's face with a strange pitiful wistfulness. It lay quiet, without moan,—a pinched pale miniature of suffering humanity,—an infant with sorrow's mark painfully impressed upon its drawn small features. Presently it stretched forth a puny hand and feebly caressed its protectress, and this too with the faintest glimmer of a smile. The woman responded to its affection with a sort of rapture; she caught it fondly to her breast and covered it with kisses, rocking it to and fro with broken words of motherly endearment.

“My little darling!” she whispered softly. “My little pet! Yes, yes I know! So tired, so cold and hungry\

Never mind, baby, never mind! we will rest here a little, then we will sing a song presently and get some money to take us home. Sleep a while longer, dearie! There! Now we are warm and cosy again!"

So saying she re-arranged her shawl in closer and tighter folds so as to protect the child more thoroughly. While she was engaged in this operation, a lady in deep mourning passed close by her, and advancing to the very steps of the altar, knelt down, hiding her face with her clasped hands. The tired wayfarer's attention was attracted by this; she gazed with a sort of dull wonder at the kneeling figure robed in rich rustling silk and crape; and gradually her eyes wandered upwards, upwards, till they rested on the gravely sweet and serenely smiling marble image of the Virgin and Child. She looked and looked again,—surprised,—incredulous; then suddenly rose to her feet and made her way to the altar-railing. There she paused, staring vaguely at a basket of flowers, white and odorous, that had been left there by some reverent worshipper. She glanced doubtfully at the swinging silver lamps, the twinkling candles; she was conscious too of a subtle strange fragrance in the air as though a basketful of spring violets and daffodils had just been carried by; then, as her wandering gaze came back to the solitary woman in black who still knelt motionless near her, a sort of choking sensation came into her throat and a stinging

moisture struggled in her eyes. She strove to turn this hysterical sensation to a low laugh of disdain; "Lord, Lord!" she muttered beneath her breath, "what sort of place is this, where they pray to a woman and a baby?"

At that moment the lady in black rose; she was young, with a proud, fair but weary face. Her eyes lighted on her soiled and poverty-stricken sister, and she paused with a pitying look. The street wanderer made use of the opportunity thus offered, and in an urgent whisper implored charity. The lady drew out her purse, then hesitated, looking wistfully at the bundle in the shawl.

"You have a little child there?" she asked in gentle accents. "May I see it?"

"Yes, lady;" and the wrapper was turned down sufficiently to disclose the tiny white face, now more infinitely touching than ever in the pathos of sleep.

"I lost my little one a week ago," said the lady simply, as she looked at it. "He was all I had." Her voice trembled, she opened her purse and placed a half-crown in the hand of the astonished supplicant. "You are happier than I am; perhaps you will pray for me! I am very lonely!"

Then dropping her long crape veil so that it completely hid her features, she bent her head and moved softly away. The woman watched her till her graceful

figure was completely lost in the gloom of the great church, and then turned again vaguely to the altar.

"Pray for her!" she thought. "I! As if I could pray!" And she smiled bitterly. Again she looked at the statue in the shrine; it had no meaning at all for her. She had never heard of Christianity save through the medium of a tract, whose consoling title had been "Stop! You are going to Hell!" Religion of every sort was mocked at by those among whom her lot was cast; the name of Christ was only used as a convenience to swear by; and therefore this mysterious, smiling, gently inviting marble figure was incomprehensible to her mind.

"As if I could pray!" she repeated with a sort of derision. Then she looked at the broad silver coin in her hand and the sleeping baby in her arms. With a sudden impulse she dropped on her knees.

"Whoever you are," she muttered, addressing the statue above her, "it seems you've got a child of your own; perhaps you'll help me to take care of this one. It isn't mine; I wish it was! Anyway I love it more than its own mother does. I daresay you won't listen to the likes of me, but if there was a God anywhere about I'd ask Him to bless that good soul that's lost her baby. I bless her with all my heart, but my blessing ain't good for much. Ah!" and she surveyed anew the Virgin's serene white countenance, "you look just as if you understood me, but I don't believe you

do! Never mind, I've said all I wanted to say this time."

Her strange petition or rather discourse concluded, she rose and walked away. The great doors of the church swung heavily behind her as she stepped out and stood once more in the muddy street. It was raining steadily—a fine, cold, penetrating rain. But the coin she held was a talisman against outer discomforts, and she continued to walk on till she came to a clean-looking dairy where for a couple of pence she was able to replenish the infant's long ago emptied feeding bottle; but she purchased nothing for herself. She had starved all day and was now too faint to eat. Soon she entered an omnibus and was driven to Charing Cross, and alighting at the great station, brilliant with its electric lamps, she paced up and down outside it, accosting several of the passers-by and imploring their pity. One man gave her a penny; another young and handsome, with a flushed intemperate face and a look of his fast-fading boyhood still about him, put his hand in his pocket and drew out all the loose coppers it contained, amounting to three pennies and an odd farthing, and dropping them into her outstretched palm, said half gaily, half boldly:

"You ought to do better than that with those big eyes of yours!" She drew back and shuddered; he broke into a coarse laugh and went his way. Standing

where he had left her, she seemed for a time lost in wretched reflections; the fretful wailing cry of the child she carried roused her, and hushing it softly, she murmured: "Yes, yes, darling, it is too wet and cold for you; we had better go." And acting suddenly on her resolve, she hailed another omnibus, this time bound for Tottenham Court Road, and was, after some dreary jolting, set down at her final destination—a dirty alley in the worst part of Seven Dials. Entering it she was hailed with a shout of derisive laughter from some rough-looking men and women who were standing grouped round a low gin-shop at the corner.

"Here's Liz!" cried one. "Here's Liz and the bloomin' kid!"

"Now, old gel, fork out! How much 'ave yer got, Liz? Treat us to a drop all round!"

Liz walked past them steadily; the conspicuous curve of her upper lip came into full play and her eyes flashed disdainfully, but she said nothing. Her silence exasperated a tangle-haired, cat-faced girl of some seventeen years, who, more than half drunk, sat on the ground clasping her knees with both arms and rocking herself lazily to and fro. "Mother Mawks!" cried she, "Mother Mawks! You're wanted! Here's Liz come back with yer babby!"

As if her words had been a powerful incantation to summon forth an evil spirit, a door in one of the

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miserable houses was thrown open and a stout woman, nearly naked to the waist, with a swollen, blotched and most hideous countenance, rushed out furiously, and darting at Liz, shook her violently by the arm.

"Where's my shullin'?" she yelled, "where's my gin? Out with it! Out with my shullin' and fourpence! None of your sneakin' ways with me; a bargain's a bargain all the world over! You're makin' a fortin' with my baby—yer know y'are; pays yer a deal better than yer old trade! Don't say it don't—yer knows it do. Yer'll not find such a sickly kid anywheres, an' it's the sickly kids wot pays an' moves the 'arts of the *kyind* ladies and *good* gentlemen,"—this with an imitative whine that excited the laughter and applause of her hearers. "You've got it cheap, I kin tell yer, an' if yer don't pay up reg'lar, there's others that'll take the chance, and thankful too!"

She stopped for lack of breath and Liz spoke quietly:

"It's all right, Mother Mawks," she said with an attempt at a smile; "here's your shilling, here's the four pennies for the gin. I don't owe you anything for the child now." She stopped and hesitated looking down tenderly at the frail creature in her arms, then added almost pleadingly, "It's asleep now. May I take it with me to-night?"

Mother Mawks, who had been testing the coins Liz

had given her by biting them ferociously with her large yellow teeth, broke into a loud laugh.

“Take it with yer! I like that! Wot imperence! Take it with yer!” Then with her huge red arms akimbo, she added with a grin, “Tell yer wot, if yer likes to pay me ’arf-a-crown, yer can ’ave it to cuddle an’ welcome!”

Another shout of approving merriment burst from the drink-soddened spectators of the little scene, and the girl crouched on the ground removed her encircling hands from her knees to clap them loudly, as she exclaimed:

“Well done, Mother Mawks! One doesn’t let out kids at night for nothing! ’T ought to be more expensive than day-time!”

The face of Liz had grown white and rigid.

“You know I can’t give you that money,” she said slowly. “I have not tasted bit or drop all day. I must live, though it doesn’t seem worth while. The child,” and her voice softened involuntarily, “is fast asleep; it’s a pity to wake it, that’s all. It will cry and fret all night, and—and I would make it warm and comfortable if you’d let me.” She raised her eyes hopefully and anxiously. “Will you?”

Mother Mawks was evidently a lady of an excitable disposition. The simple request seemed to drive her *nearly* frantic. She raised her voice to an absolute

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scream, thrusting her dirty hands through her still dirtier hair as the proper accompanying gesture to her vituperative oratory.

"Will I! Will I!" she screeched. "Will I let out my hown babby for the night for nothing? Will I? No, I won't! I'll see yer blowed into the middle of next week fust! Lor' a' mussey! 'ow 'igh an' mighty we are gittin' *to* be sure! The babby'll be quiet with you, Miss Liz; will it *hindeed*! An' it will cry an' fret with its hown mother; will it *hindeed*!" And at every sentence she approached Liz more nearly, increasing in fury as she advanced. "Yer low hussey! D'ye think I'd let yer 'ave my babby for a hour unless yer paid for't? As it is yer pays far too little. I'm a honest woman as works for my livin' an' wot drinks reasonable, better than you by a long sight, with your stuck-up airs! A pretty drab *you* are! Gi' me the babby; ye an't no business to keep it a minit longer;" and she made a grab at Liz's sheltering shawl.

"Oh, don't hurt it!" pleaded Liz tremblingly. "Such a little thing; don't hurt it!"

Mother Mawks stared so wildly that her blood-shot eyes seemed protruding from her head.

"'Urt it! Hain't I a right to do wot I likes with my hown babby! 'Urt it! Well I never! Look 'ere!" and she turned round on the assembled neighbours. "Haint she a reg'lar one! She don't care for the law,

not she! She's keepin' back a child from its hown mother!" And with that she made a fierce attack on the shawl and succeeded in dragging the infant from Liz's reluctant arms. Wakened thus roughly from its slumbers, the poor mite set up a feeble wailing; its mother, enraged at the sound, shook it violently till it gasped for breath.

"Drat the little beast!" she cried. "Why don't it choke an' 'ave done with it!"

And without heeding the terrified remonstrances of Liz she flung the child roughly, as though it were a ball, through the open door of her lodging, where it fell on a heap of dirty clothes, and lay motionless; its wailing had ceased.

"Oh, baby, baby!" exclaimed Liz in accents of poignant distress. "Oh! you have killed it I am sure! Oh, you are cruel, cruel! Oh baby, baby!"

And she broke into a tempestuous passion of sobs and tears. The bystanders looked on in unmoved silence. Mother Mawks gathered her torn garments round her with a gesture of defiance, and sniffed the air as though she said, "Any one who wants to meddle with me will get the worst of it." There was a brief pause; suddenly a man staggered out of the gin-shop, smearing the back of his hand across his mouth as he came,—a massively-built, ill-favoured brute with a shock of uncombed red hair and small ferret-like eyes. He stared

stupidly at the weeping Liz, then at Mother Mawks, finally from one to the other of the loafers who stood by.

"Wot's the row?" he demanded thickly. "Wot's up? 'Ave it out fair! Joe Mawks'll stand by an' see fair game. Fire away, my hearties! fire, fire away!" And with a chuckling idiot laugh he dived into the pocket of his torn corduroy trousers and produced a pipe. Filling this leisurely from a greasy pouch, with such unsteady fingers that the tobacco dropped all over him, he lit it, repeating with increased thickness of utterance "Wot's the row? 'Ave it out fair!"

"It's about your babby, Joe!" cried the girl before-mentioned, jumping up from her seat on the ground with such force that her hair came tumbling all about her in a dark dank mist through which her thin eager face spitefully peered. "Liz has gone crazy! She wants your babby to cuddle!" And she screamed with sudden laughter, "Eh, eh! fancy! Wants a babby to cuddle!"

The stupefied Joe blinked drowsily and sucked the stem of his pipe with apparent relish. Then as if he had been engaged in deep meditation on the subject, he removed his smoky consoler from his mouth and said, "W'y not? Wants a babby to cuddle? All right! Let 'er 'ave it—w'y not?"

At these words Liz looked up hopefully through

her tears, but Mother Mawks darted forward in raving indignation.

"Yer great drunken fool!" she yelled to her besotted spouse, "aren't yer ashamed of yerself? Wot! Let out yer babby a whole night for nuthin'? It's lucky I've got my wits about me; an' I say Liz *shan't* 'ave it! There now!"

The man looked at her and a dogged resolution darkened his repulsive countenance. He raised his big fist, clenched it, and hit straight out, giving his infuriated wife a black eye in much less than a minute. "An' I say she *shall* 'ave it! Wheer are ye now?"

In answer to this query Mother Mawks might have said that she was "all there," for she returned her husband's blow with interest and force, and in a couple of seconds the happy pair were engaged in a "stand-up" fight, to the intense admiration and excitement of the inhabitants of the little alley. Every one in the place thronged to watch the combatants and to hear the blasphemous oaths and curses with which the battle was accompanied. In the midst of the affray, a wizened, bent old man, who had been sitting at his door sorting rags in a basket, and apparently taking no heed of the clamour around him, made a sign to Liz.

"Take the kid now," he whispered. "Nobody'll notice. I'll see they don't come arter ye." Liz thanked him mutely by a look, and rushing to the house where

the child still lay, seemingly inanimate, on the floor among the soiled clothes, she caught it up eagerly and hurried away to her own poor garret in a tumble-down tenement at the furthest end of the alley. The infant had been stunned by its fall, but under her tender care, and rocked in the warmth of her caressing arms, it soon recovered, though when its blue eyes opened they were full of a bewildered pain such as may be seen in the eyes of a shot bird.

"My pet! my poor little darling!" she murmured over and over again, kissing its wee white face and soft hands; "I wish I was your mother—Lord knows I do! As it is you're all I've got to care for. And you do love me, baby, don't you? just a little, little bit!" And as she renewed her fondling embraces, the tiny, sad-visaged creature uttered a low crooning sound of baby satisfaction in response to her endearments,—a sound more sweet to her ears than the most exquisite music, and which brought a smile to her mouth and a pathos to her dark eyes, rendering her face for the moment almost beautiful. Holding the child closely to her breast, she looked cautiously out of her narrow window, and perceived that the connubial fight was over. From the shouts of laughter and plaudits that reached her ears Joe Mawks had evidently won the day; his wife had disappeared from the field. She saw the little crowd dispersing, most of those who composed it entering the

gin-shop, and very soon the alley was comparatively quiet and deserted. By-and-by she heard her name called in a low voice: "Liz! Liz!"

She looked down and saw the old man who had promised her his protection in case Mother Mawks should persecute her. "Is that you, Jim? Come upstairs, it's better than talking out there." He obeyed, and stood before her in the wretched room, looking curiously both at her and the baby. A wiry, wolfish-faced being was Jim Duds, as he was familiarly called, though his own name was the aristocratic and singularly inappropriate one of James Douglas; he was more like an animal than a human creature, with his straggling grey hair, bushy beard, and sharp teeth protruding like fangs from beneath his upper lip. His profession was that of an area-thief, and he considered it a sufficiently respectable calling.

"Mother Mawks has got it this time," he said with a grin which was more like a snarl. "Joe's blood was up an' he pounded her nigh into a jelly. She'll leave ye quiet now; so long as ye pay the hire reg'lar ye'll have Joe on yer side. If so be as there's a bad day, ye'd better not come home at all."

"I know," said Liz, "but she's always had the money for the child, and surely it wasn't much to ask her to let me keep it warm on such a cold night as this."

Jim Duds looked meditative. "Wot makes ye

care for that babby so much?" he asked. "'Tain't yourn."

Liz sighed.

"No!" she said sadly. "That's true. But it seems something to hold on to like. See what my life has been!" She stopped and a wave of colour flushed her pallid features. "From a little girl, nothing but the streets—the long cruel streets! and I just a bit of dirt on the pavement—no more; flung here, flung there, and at last swept into the gutter. All dark—all useless!" She laughed a little. "Fancy, Jim! I've never seen the country!"

"Nor I," said Jim, biting a piece of straw reflectively. "It must be powerful fine, with nought but green trees an' posies a' blowin' an' a' growin' everywheres. There ain't many kitching areas there though, I'm told."

Liz went on, scarcely heeding him: "The baby seems to me like what the country must be—all harmless and sweet and quiet; when I hold it so, my heart gets peaceful somehow,—I don't know why."

Again Jim looked speculative. He waved his bitten straw expressively.

"Ye've had 'sperience, Liz. Haint ye met no man like, wot ye could care fur?"

Liz trembled and her eyes grew wild.

"Men!" she cried with bitterest scorn—"no *men* have come my way, only brutes!"

Jim stared, but was silent; he had no fit answer ready. Presently Liz spoke again more softly:

"Jim, do you know I went into a great church to-day?"

"Worse luck!" said Jim sententiously. "Church ain't no use nohow as fur as I can see."

"There was a figure there, Jim," went on Liz, earnestly, "of a Woman holding up a Baby, and people knelt down before it. What do you s'pose it was?"

"Can't say!" replied the puzzled Jim. "Are ye sure 'twas a church? Most like 'twas a moo'seum."

"No, no!" said Liz. "'Twas a church for certain; there were folks praying in it."

"Ah well!" growled Jim, gruffly, "much good may it do 'em! I'm not of the prayin' sort. A woman an' a babby, did ye say? Don't ye get such cranky notions into yer head, Liz! Women an' babbies are common enough—too common by a long chalk, an' as for prayin' to 'em—" Jim's utter contempt and incredulity were too great for further expression, and he turned away, wishing her a curt "Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said Liz softly, and long after he had left her she still sat silent, thinking, thinking, with the baby asleep in her arms, listening to the rain as it dripped, dripped, heavily, like clods falling on a coffin-lid. She was not a good woman—far from it. Her very motive in hiring the infant at so much a day was entirely in-

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excusable—it was simply to gain money upon false pretences, by exciting more pity than would otherwise have been bestowed on her had she begged for herself alone, without a child in her arms. At first she had carried the baby about to serve as a mere trick of her trade, but the warm feel of its little helpless body against her bosom day after day had softened her heart towards its innocence and pitiful weakness, and at last she had grown to love it with a strange, intense passion,—so much that she would willingly have sacrificed her life for its sake. She knew that its own parents cared nothing for it, except for the money it brought them through her hands, and often wild plans would form themselves in her poor tired brain,—plans of running away with it altogether from the roaring, devouring city, to some sweet humble country village, there to obtain work, and devote herself to making this one little child happy. Poor Liz! Poor, bewildered, heart-broken Liz! Ignorant London heathen as she was, there was one fragrant flower blossoming in the desert of her soiled and wasted existence—the flower of a pure and guileless love for one of those “little ones” of whom it hath been said by an All-Pitying Divinity unknown to her: “Suffer them to come unto Me and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

The dreary winter days crept on apace, and as they drew near Christmas, dwellers in the streets leading off

the Strand grew accustomed of nights to hear the plaintive voice of a woman, singing in a peculiarly thrilling and pathetic manner some of the old songs and ballads familiar and dear to the heart of every Englishman.—“The Banks of Allan Water,” “The Bailiff’s Daughter,” “Sally in our Alley,” “The Last Rose of Summer;” all these well loved ditties she sang one after the other, and though her notes were neither fresh nor powerful, they were true and often tender, more particularly in the hackneyed but still captivating melody of “Home, sweet Home.” Windows were opened, and pennies freely showered on the street vocalist, who was accompanied in all her wanderings by a fragile infant, which she seemed to carry with especial care and tenderness. Sometimes, too, in the bleak afternoons, she would be seen wending her way through mud and mire, setting her weary face against the bitter east wind, and patiently singing on,—and motherly women coming from the gay shops and stores where they had been purchasing Christmas toys for their own children would often stop to look at the baby’s pinched white features with pity, and would say, while giving their spare pennies, “Poor little thing! Is it not very ill?” while Liz, her heart freezing with sudden terror, would exclaim hurriedly, “Oh, no, no! It is always pale; it is just a little bit weak, that’s all!” and the kindly questioners, touched by the large despair of her dark eyes, would pass on

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and say no more. And Christmas came—the birthday of the Child Christ;—a feast, the sacred meaning of which was unknown to Liz; she only recognised it as a sort of large and somewhat dull bank-holiday, when all London devoted itself to church-going and the eating of roast beef and plum-pudding. The whole thing was incomprehensible to her mind,—but even her sad countenance was brighter than usual on Christmas Eve, and she felt almost gay, for had she not, by means of a little extra starvation on her own part, been able to buy a wondrous gold and crimson worsted bird suspended from an elastic string, a bird which bobbed up and down to command in the most lively and artistic manner, and had not her hired baby actually laughed at the clumsy toy,—laughed an elfish and weird little laugh, the first it had ever indulged in? And Liz had laughed too, for pure gladness in the child's mirth, and the worsted bird became a sort of uncouth charm to make them both merry.

But after Christmas had come and gone, and the melancholy days, the last beatings of the failing pulse of the Old Year throbbed slowly and heavily away, the baby took upon its wan visage a strange expression;—the expression of worn-out and suffering age. Its blue eyes grew more solemnly speculative and dreamy, and after a while it seemed to lose all taste for the petty things of this world, and the low desires of mere humanity. &

lay very quiet in Liz's arms; it never cried, and was no longer fretful, and it seemed to listen with a sort of mild approval to the tones of her voice as they rang out in the dreary streets through which, by day and night, she patiently wandered. By and bye the worsted bird, too, fell out of favour; it jumped and glittered in vain; the baby surveyed it with an unmoved air of superior wisdom—just as if it had suddenly found out what real birds were like, and was not to be deceived into accepting so poor an imitation of Nature. Liz grew uneasy, but she had no one in whom to confide her fears. She had been very regular in her payments to Mother Mawks, and that irate lady, kept in order by her bull-dog of a husband, had been of late very contented to let her have the child without further interference. Liz knew well enough that no one in the miserable alley where she dwelt would care whether the baby were ill or not. They would tell her "The more sickly the better for your trade." Besides, she was jealous—she could not endure the idea of anyone touching or tending it but herself. Children were often ailing, she thought, and if left to themselves without doctors' stuff they recovered sometimes more quickly than they had sickened. Thus soothing her inward tremors as best she might, she took more care than ever of her frail charge, stinting herself that she might nourish it, though the baby seemed to care less and

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less for mundane necessities, and only submitted to be fed, as it were, under patient and silent protest.

And so the sands in Time's hour-glass ran slowly but surely away, and it was New Year's Eve. Liz had wandered about all day singing her little repertoire of ballads in the teeth of a cruel, snow-laden wind;—so cruel, that people, otherwise charitably disposed, had shut close their doors and windows, and had not even heard her voice. Thus the last span of the Old Year had proved most unprofitable and dreary: she had gained no more than sixpence; how could she return with only that humble amount to face Mother Mawks and her vituperative fury? Her throat ached,—she was very tired, and as the night darkened from pale to deep and starless shadows, she strolled mechanically from the Strand to the Embankment, and after walking some little distance she sat down in a corner close to Cleopatra's Needle—that mocking obelisk that has looked upon the decay of empires, itself impassive, and that still appears to say, "Pass on, ye puny generations! I, a mere carven block of stone shall outlive you all." For the first time in all her experience the child in her arms seemed a heavy burden. She put aside her shawl and surveyed it tenderly; it was fast asleep, a small, peaceful smile on its thin, quiet face. Thoroughly worn out herself, she leaned her head against the damp stone wall behind her, and clasping the infant tightly to her

breast, she also slept—the heavy dreamless sleep of utter fatigue and physical exhaustion. The solemn night moved on, a night of black vapours; the pageant of the Old Year's death-bed was unbrightened by so much as a single star. None of the hurrying passers-by perceived the weary woman where she slept in that obscure corner, and for a long while she rested there undisturbed. Suddenly a vivid glare of light dazzled her eyes; she started to her feet half asleep, but still instinctively retaining the infant in her close embrace. A dark form, buttoned to the throat, and holding a brilliant bull-eye's lantern stood before her.


"Come now," said this personage, "this won't do! Move on!"

Liz smiled, faintly and apologetically.

"All right!" she answered striving to speak cheerfully, and raising her eyes to the policeman's good-natured countenance. "I didn't mean to fall asleep here. I don't know how I came to do it. I must go home of course."

"Of course!" said the policeman, somewhat mollified by her evident humility, and touched in spite of himself by the pathos of her eyes. Then turning his lamp more fully upon her, he continued, "Is that a baby you've got there?"

"Yes," said Liz half proudly, half tenderly. "Poor little dear, it's been ailing sadly—but I think it's better



now than it was," and encouraged by his friendly tone, she opened the folds of her shawl to show him her one treasure. The bull's eye came into still closer requisition, as the kindly guardian of the peace peered inquiringly at the tiny bundle. He had scarcely looked when he started back with an exclamation:

"God bless my soul!" he cried, "it's dead!"

"*Dead!*" shrieked Liz. "Oh, no, no! Not *dead!* *Don't* say so, oh don't, *don't* say so! Oh, you *can't* mean it! Oh, for God's love say you didn't mean it! It can't be dead, not really *dead*, no, no, indeed! Oh, baby! baby! you are not dead, my pet, my angel, not *dead*, oh no!"

And breathless, frantic with fear, she felt the little thing's hands and feet and face, kissed it wildly, and called it by a thousand endearing names;—in vain—in vain! Its tiny body was already stiff and rigid; it had been a corpse more than two hours.

The policeman coughed, and brushed his thick gauntlet glove across his eyes. He was an emissary of the law, but he had a heart. He thought of his bright-eyed wife at home, and of the soft-cheeked, cuddling little creature that clung to her bosom and crowed with rapture whenever he came near.

"Look here," he said very gently, laying one hand on the woman's shoulder as she crouched shivering against the wall, staring piteously at the motionless

waxen form in her arms, "It's no use fretting about it," he paused—there was an uncomfortable lump in his throat, and he had to cough again to get it down. "The poor little creature's gone,—there's no help for it. The next world's a better place than this, you know! There, there! Don't take on so about it,"—this as Liz shuddered and sighed, a sigh of such complete despair that it went straight to his honest soul and showed him how futile were his efforts at consolation. But he had his duty to attend to, and he went on in firmer tones, "Now, like a good woman, you will just move off from here and go home. If I leave you here by yourself a bit, will you promise me to go straight home? I mustn't find you here when I come back on this beat, d'ye understand?" Liz nodded. "That's right," he resumed cheerily, "I'll give you just ten minutes; you just go straight home."

And with a "Good night," uttered in accents meant to be comforting, he turned away and paced on, his measured tread echoing on the silence at first loudly, then fainter and fainter, till it altogether died away, as his bulky figure disappeared in the distance. Left to herself, Liz rose from her crouching posture; rocking the dead child in her arms she smiled. "Go straight home!" she murmured half aloud, "Home, sweet home! Yes, baby; yes, my darling, we will go home together!" And creeping cautiously along in the shadows she

reached a flight of the broad stone steps leading down to the river. She descended them one by one; the black water lapped against them heavily, heavily; the tide was full up. She paused; a sonorous, deep-toned, iron voice rang through the air with reverberating solemn melody. It was the great bell of St. Paul's, tolling midnight,—the Old Year was dead. "Straight home!" she repeated with a beautiful expectant look in her wild, weary eyes. "My little darling! Yes, we are both tired, we will go home! Home, sweet home! We will go!"

Kissing the cold face of the baby corpse she held, she threw herself forward; there followed a sullen, deep splash—a slight struggle—and all was over! The water lapped against the steps heavily, heavily as before; the policeman passed once more, and saw to his satisfaction that the coast was clear; through the dark veil of the sky one star looked out and twinkled for a brief instant, then disappeared again. A clash and clamour of bells startled the brooding night;—here and there a window was opened, and figures appeared in balconies to listen. They were ringing in the New Year,—the festival of hope, the birthday of the world! But what were New Years to her, who with white upturned face and arms that embraced an infant in the tenacious grip of death, went drifting, drifting, solemnly down the dark river, unseen, unpitied of all those who awoke to new hopes and aspirations on that first morning of another life-

probation! Liz had gone—gone to make her peace with God,—perhaps through the aid of her “Hired Baby”—the little sinless soul she had so fondly cherished, gone to that sweetest “Home” we dream of and pray for, where the lost and bewildered wanderers on this earth shall find true welcome and rest from grief and exile—gone to that fair, far Glory-World where reigns the Divine Master whose words still ring above the tumult of ages: “See that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you that their Angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.”

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## THE LADY WITH THE CARNATIONS.

A DREAM OR A DELUSION?

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It was in the Louvre that I first saw her—or rather her picture. Greuze painted her—so I was told; but the name of the artist scarcely affected me—I was absorbed in the woman herself, who looked at me from the dumb canvas with that still smile on her face, and that burning cluster of carnations clasped to her breast. I felt that I knew her. Moreover, there was a strange attraction in her eyes that held mine fascinated. It was as though she said “Stay till I have told thee all!” A faint blush tinged her cheek,—one loose tress of fair hair fell caressingly on her half-uncovered bosom. And, surely, was I dreaming?—or did I smell the odour of carnations on the air? I started from my reverie,—a slight tremor shook my nerves. I turned to go. An artist carrying a large easel and painting materials just then approached, and placing himself opposite the picture, began to copy it. I watched him at work for a few moments—his strokes were firm, and his eye

accurate; but I knew, without waiting to observe his further progress, that there was an indefinable something in that pictured face that he with all his skill would never be able to delineate as Greuze had done—if Greuze indeed were the painter, of which I did not then, and do not now, feel sure. I walked slowly away. On the threshold of the room I looked back. Yes! there it was—that fleeting, strange, appealing expression that seemed mutely to call to *me*; that half-wild yet sweet smile that had a world of unuttered pathos in it. A kind of misgiving troubled me—a presentiment of evil that I could not understand,—and, vexed with myself for my own foolish imaginings, I hastened down the broad staircase that led from the picture galleries, and began to make my way out through that noble hall of ancient sculpture in which stands the defiantly beautiful *Apollo Belvedere* and the world-famous *Artemis*. The sun shone brilliantly; numbers of people were passing and repassing. Suddenly my heart gave a violent throb, and I stopped short in my walk, amazed and incredulous. Who was that seated on the bench close to the *Artemis*, reading? Who, if not “the Lady with the Carnations,” clad in white, her head slightly bent, and her hand clasping a bunch of her own symbolic flowers! Nervously I approached her. As my steps echoed on the marble pavement she looked up; her gray-green eyes met mine in that slow wistful smile that was so indescribably sad.



Confused as my thoughts were, I observed her pallor, and the ethereal delicacy of her face and form—she had no hat on, and her neck and shoulders were uncovered. Struck by this peculiarity, I wondered if the other people who were passing through the hall noticed her *déshabille*. I looked around me enquiringly—not one passer-by turned a glance in our direction! Yet surely the lady's costume was strange enough to attract attention? A chill of horror quivered through me,—was *I* the only one who saw her sitting there? This idea was so alarming that I uttered an involuntary exclamation; the next moment the seat before me was empty, the strange lady had gone, and nothing remained of her but—the strong sweet odour of the carnations she had carried! With a sort of sickness at my heart I hurried out of the Louvre, and was glad when I found myself in the bright Paris streets filled with eager, pressing people, all bent on their different errands of business or pleasure. I entered a carriage and was driven rapidly to the Grand Hotel, where I was staying with a party of friends. I refrained from speaking of the curious sensations that had overcome me—I did not even mention the picture that had exercised so weird an influence upon me. The brilliancy of the life we led, the constant change and activity of our movements, soon dispersed the nervous emotion I had undergone; and though sometimes the remembrance of it returned to

me, I avoided dwelling on the subject. Ten or twelve days passed, and one night we all went to the Théâtre Français—it was the first evening of my life that I ever was in the strange position of being witness to a play without either knowing its name or understanding its meaning. I could only realize one thing—namely, that “the Lady with the Carnations” sat in the box opposite to me, regarding me fixedly. She was alone; her costume was unchanged. I addressed one of our party in a low voice:

“Do you see that girl opposite, in white, with the shaded crimson carnations in her dress?”

My friend looked, shook her head, and rejoined:

“No; where is she sitting?”

“Right opposite!” I repeated in a more excited tone. “Surely you can see her! She is alone in that large box *en face*.”

My friend turned to me in wonder. “You must be dreaming, my dear! That large box is perfectly empty!”

Empty!—I knew better! But I endeavoured to smile; I said I had made a mistake—that the lady I spoke of had moved—and so changed the subject. But throughout the evening, though I feigned to watch the stage, my eyes were continually turning to the place where SHE sat so quietly, with her steadfast, mournful gaze fixed upon me. One addition to her costume she had,—a fan,—which from the distance at which I be-

held it seemed to be made of very old yellow lace, mounted on sticks of filagree silver. She used this occasionally, waving it slowly to and fro in a sort of dreamy, meditative fashion; and ever and again she smiled that pained, patient smile which, though it hinted much, betrayed nothing. When we rose to leave the theatre "the Lady with the Carnations" rose also, and drawing a lace wrap about her head, she disappeared. Afterwards I saw her gliding through one of the outer lobbies; she looked so slight and frail and childlike, alone in the pushing, brilliant crowd, that my heart went out to her in a sort of fantastic tenderness. "Whether she be a disembodied spirit," I mused, "or an illusion called up by some disorder of my own imagination, I do not know; but she seems so sad, that even were she a Dream, I pity her!"

This thought passed through my brain as in company with my friends I reached the outer door of the theatre. A touch on my arm startled me—a little white hand clasping a cluster of carnations rested there for a second,—then vanished. I was somewhat overcome by this new experience; but my sensations this time were not those of fear. I became certain that this haunting image followed me for some reason; and I determined not to give way to any foolish terror concerning it, but to calmly await the course of events, that would in time, I felt convinced, explain everything. I stayed a fort-

night longer in Paris without seeing anything more of "the Lady with the Carnations," except photographs of her picture in the Louvre, one of which I bought—though it gave but a feeble idea of the original masterpiece—and then I left for Brittany. Some English friends of mine, Mr. and Mrs. Fairleigh, had taken up their abode in a quaint old rambling château near Quimperlé on the coast of Finisterre, and they had pressed me cordially to stay with them for a fortnight—an invitation which I gladly accepted. The house was built on a lofty rock overlooking the sea; the surrounding coast was eminently wild and picturesque; and on the day I arrived, there was a boisterous wind which lifted high the crests of the billows and dashed them against the jutting crags with grand and terrific uproar. Mrs. Fairleigh, a bright, practical woman, whose life was entirely absorbed in household management, welcomed me with effusion—she and her two handsome boys, Rupert and Frank, were full of enthusiasm for the glories and advantages of their holiday resort.

"Such a beach!" cried Rupert, executing a sort of Indian war-dance beside me on the path.

"And such jolly walks and drives!" chorussed his brother.

"Yes, really!" warbled my hostess in her clear gay voice; "I'm delighted we came here. And the château is such a funny old place, full of odd nooks and

corners. The country people, you know, are dreadfully superstitious, and they say it is haunted; but of course that's all nonsense! Though if there *were* a ghost, we should send you to interrogate it, my dear!"

This with a smile of good-natured irony at me. I laughed. Mrs. Fairleigh was one of those eminently sensible persons who had seriously lectured me on a book known as "A Romance of Two Worlds," as inculcating spiritualistic theories, and therefore deserving condemnation.

I turned the subject.

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

"Three weeks—and we haven't explored half the neighbourhood yet. There are parts of the house itself we don't know. Once upon a time—so the villagers say—a great painter lived here. Well, his studio runs the whole length of the château, and that and some other rooms are locked up. It seems they are never let to strangers. Not that we want them—the place is too big for us as it is."

"What was the painter's name?" I enquired, pausing as I ascended the terrace to admire the grand sweep of the sea.

"Oh, I forget! His pictures were so like those of Greuze that few can tell the difference between them, —and—"

I interrupted her. "Tell me," I said with a faint smile, "have you any carnations growing here?"

"Carnations! I should think so! The place is full of them. Isn't the odour delicious?" And as we reached the highest terrace in front of the château I saw that the garden was ablaze with these brilliant scented blossoms, of every shade, varying from the palest salmon pink to the deepest, darkest scarlet. This time that subtle fragrance was not my fancy, and I gathered a few of the flowers to wear in my dress at dinner. Mr. Fairleigh now came out to receive us, and the conversation became general.

I was delighted with the interior of the house; it was so quaint, and old, and suggestive. There was a dark oaken staircase, with a most curiously carved and twisted balustrade—some ancient tapestry still hung on the walls—and there were faded portraits of stiff ladies in ruffs, and maliciously smiling knights in armour, that depressed rather than decorated the dining-room. The chamber assigned to me upstairs was rather bright than otherwise—it fronted the sea, and was cheerfully and prettily furnished. I noticed, however, that it was next door to the shut-up and long-deserted studio. The garden was, as Mrs. Fairleigh had declared, full of carnations. I never saw so many of these flowers growing in one spot. They seemed to spring up everywhere, like weeds, even in the most deserted and shady corners.

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I had been at the château some three or four days, when one morning I happened to be walking alone in a sort of shrubbery at the back of the house, when I perceived in the long dank grass at my feet a large grey stone, that had evidently once stood upright, but had now fallen flat, burying itself partly in the earth. There was something carved upon it. I stooped down, and clearing away the grass and weeds, made out the words

“MANON

Cœur perfide!”

Surely this was a strange inscription! I told my discovery to the Fairleighs, and we all examined and re-examined the mysterious slab, without being able to arrive at any satisfactory explanation of its pictures. Even enquiries made among the villagers failed to elicit anything save shakes of the head, and such remarks as “Ah, Madame! si on savait! . . .,” or “Je crois bien qu’il y a une histoire là!”

One evening we all returned to the château at rather a later hour than usual, after a long and delightful walk on the beach in the mellow radiance of a glorious moon. When I went to my room I had no inclination to go to bed—I was wide awake, and moreover in a sort of expectant frame of mind; expectant, though I knew not what I expected.

I threw my window open, leaning out and looking

at the moon-enchanted sea, and inhaling the exquisite fragrance of the carnations wafted to me on every breath of the night wind. I thought of many things—the glory of life; the large benevolence of Nature; the mystery of death; the beauty and certainty of immortality, and then, though my back was turned to the interior of my room, I knew,—I felt, I was no longer alone. I forced myself to move round from the window; slowly but determinedly I brought myself to confront whoever it was that had thus entered through my locked door; and I was scarcely surprised when I saw “the Lady with the Carnations” standing at a little distance from me, with a most woebegone, appealing expression on her shadowy lovely face. I looked at her, resolved not to fear her; and then brought all my will to bear on unravelling the mystery of my strange visitant. As I met her gaze unflinchingly she made a sort of timid gesture with her hands, as though she besought something.

“Why are you here?” I asked, in a low, clear tone.  
“Why do you follow me?”

Again she made that little appealing movement. Her answer, soft as a child’s whisper, floated through the room:

“You pitied me!”

“Are you unhappy?”

“Very!” And here she clasped her wan white

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fingers together in a sort of agony. I was growing nervous, but I continued:

"Tell me, then, what you wish me to do?"

She raised her eyes in passionate supplication.

"Pray for me! No one has prayed for me ever since I died—no one has pitied me for a hundred years!"

"How did you die?" I asked, trying to control the rapid beating of my heart. The "Lady with the Carnations" smiled most mournfully, and slowly unfastened the cluster of flowers from her breast—there her white robe was darkly stained with blood. She pointed to the stain, and then replaced the flowers. I understood.

"Murdered!" I whispered, more to myself than to my pale visitor—"murdered!"

"No one knows, and no one prays for me!" wailed the faint sweet spirit voice—"and though I am dead I cannot rest. Pray for me—I am tired!"

And her slender head drooped wearily—she seemed about to vanish. I conquered my rising terrors by a strong effort, and said:

"Tell me—you *must* tell me"—here she raised her head, and her large pensive eyes met mine obediently—"who was your murderer?"

"He did not mean it," she answered. "He loved me. It was here"—and she raised one hand and motioned towards the adjacent studio—"here he drew

my picture. He thought me false—but I was true. ‘Manon, cœur perfide!’ Oh, no, no, no! It should be ‘Manon, cœur fidèle!’”

She paused and looked at me appealingly. Again she pointed to the studio.

“Go and see!” she sighed. “Then you will pray—and I will never come again. Promise you will pray for me—it was here he killed me—and I died without a prayer.”

“Where were you buried?” I asked, in a hushed voice.

“In the waves,” she murmured; “thrown in the wild cold waves; and no one knew—no one ever found poor Manon; alone and sad for a hundred years, with no word said to God for her!”

Her face was so full of plaintive pathos, that I could have wept. Watching her as she stood, I knelt at the quaint old prie-Dieu just within my reach, and prayed as she desired. Slowly, slowly, slowly a rapturous light came into her eyes; she smiled and waved her hands towards me in farewell. She glided backwards towards the door—and her figure grew dim and indistinct. For the last time she turned her now radiant countenance upon me, and said in thrilling accents—

“Write, ‘Manon cœur fidèle!’”

I cannot remember how the rest of the night passed; but I know that with the early morning, rousing myself

from the stupor of sleep into which I had fallen, I hurried to the door of the closed studio. It was ajar! I pushed it boldly open and entered. The room was long and lofty, but destitute of all furniture save a battered-looking, worm-eaten easel that leaned up against the damp stained wall. I approached this relic of the painter's art, and examining it closely, perceived the name "Manon" cut roughly yet deeply upon it. Looking curiously about, I saw what had nearly escaped my notice—a sort of hanging cupboard, on the left-hand side of the large central bay window. I tried its handle—it was unlocked, and opened easily. Within it lay three things—a palette, on which the blurring marks of long obliterated pigments were still faintly visible; a dagger, unsheathed, with its blade almost black with rust; and—the silver filagree sticks of a fan, to which clung some mouldy shreds of yellow lace. I remembered the fan the "Lady with the Carnations" had carried at the Théâtre Français; and I pieced together her broken story. She had been slain by her artist lover—slain in a sudden fit of jealousy ere the soft colours on his picture of her were yet dry—murdered in this very studio; and no doubt that hidden dagger was the weapon used. Poor Manon! Her frail body had been cast from the high rock on which the château stood "into the wild cold waves," as she or her spirit had said; and her cruel lover had carried his wrath against

her so far as to perpetuate a slander against her by writing "Cœur perfide" on that imperishable block of stone! Full of pitying thoughts I shut the cupboard, and slowly left the studio, closing the door noiselessly after me.


That morning as soon as I could get Mrs. Fairleigh alone I told her my adventure, beginning with the very first experience I had had of the picture in the Louvre. Needless to say, she heard me with the utmost incredulity.

"I know you, my dear!" she said, shaking her head at me wisely; "you are full of fancies, and always dreaming about the next world, as if this one wasn't good enough for you. The whole thing is a delusion."

"But," I persisted, "you know the studio was shut and locked; how is it that it is open now?"

"It isn't open!" declared Mrs. Fairleigh—"though I'm quite willing to believe you dreamt it *was*."

"Come and see!" I exclaimed eagerly; and I took her upstairs, though she was somewhat reluctant to follow me. As I had said, the studio *was* open. I led her in, and showed her the name cut on the easel, and the hanging cupboard with its contents. As these convincing proofs of my story met her eyes, she shivered a little, and grew rather pale.



"Come away," she said nervously—"you are really *too* horrid! I can't bear this sort of thing! For goodness' sake, keep your ghosts to yourself!" I saw she was vexed and pettish, and I readily followed her out of the barren, forlorn-looking room. Scarcely were we well outside the door when it shut with a sharp click. I tried it—it was fast locked! This was too much for Mrs. Fairleigh. She rushed downstairs in a perfect paroxysm of terror; and when I found her in the breakfast-room she declared she would not stop another day in the house. I managed to calm her fears, however; but she insisted on my remaining with her to brave out whatever else might happen at what she persisted now in calling the "haunted" château, in spite of her practical theories. And so I stayed on. And when we left Brittany, we left all together, without having had our peace disturbed by any more manifestations of an unearthly nature. One thing alone troubled me a little—I should have liked to obliterate the word "*perfide*" from that stone, and to have had "*fidèle*" carved on it instead; but it was too deeply engraved for this. However, I have seen no more of "the Lady with the Carnations." But I know the dead need praying for—and that they often suffer for lack of such prayers,—though I cannot pretend to explain the reason why. And I know that the picture in the Louvre is not a Greuze, though it is called one—it is the portrait of a faithful woman deeply wronged;

and her name is here written as she told me to  
write it—

“MANON  
Cœur Fidèle!”

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## “MADEMOISELLE ZÉPHYR.”

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A vision of loveliness? A dream of beauty? Yes, she was all this and more. She was the very embodiment of ethereal grace and dainty delicacy. The first time I saw her she was queen of a fairy revel. Her hands grasped a sceptre so light and sparkling that it looked like a rod of moonbeams; her tiny waist was encircled by a garland of moss rosebuds, glittering with dew, and a crown of stars encircled her fair white brow. Innocent as a snow-flake she looked, with her sweet serious eyes and falling golden hair; yet she was “Mademoiselle Zéphyr”—a mere *danseuse* on the stage of a great and successful theatre—an actress whose gestures were simple and unaffected, and therefore perfectly fascinating, and whose trustful smile at the huge audience that nightly applauded her efforts startled sudden tears out of many a mother’s eye, and caused many a fond father’s heart to grow heavy with foreboding pity. For “Mademoiselle Zéphyr” was only six years old! Only six summers had gilded the “refined

gold" of the little head that now wore its wreath of tinsel stars; and scarcely had the delicate young limbs learned their use, than they were twisted, tortured, and cramped in all those painful positions so bitterly known to students of the "ballet."

"A very promising child," the wealthy manager of the theatre had said, noticing her on one of the "training" days, and observing with pleasure the grace with which "Mademoiselle" lifted her tiny rounded arms above her head, and pointed her miniature foot in all the approved methods, while she smiled up into his big fat face with all the fearless confidence of her age and sex.

And so the "promising child" advanced step by step in her profession, till here she was, promoted to the honour of being announced, on the great staring placards outside the theatre, as "Mademoiselle Zéphyr," the "Wonderful Child-Dancer!" and, what was dearer far to her simple little soul, she was given the part of the "Fairy Queen," in the grand Christmas pantomime of that year—a rôle in which it was her pride and pleasure to be able to summon elves, gnomes, witches, and flower-sprites with one wave of her magic wand. And she did it well too; never could wand or sceptre sway with prettier dignity or sweeter gravity; never did *high* commands issuing from the lips of mighty poten-

tates sound so quaintly effective as "Mademoiselle Zéphyr's" tremendous utterance:


"You naughty elves! begone to yon dark wood!  
You'll all be punished if you are not *dood!*"

This word "*dood*," pronounced with almost tragic emphasis in the clearest of baby voices, was perhaps one of the greatest "hits" in Mademoiselle's small repertoire of "effects;" though I think the little song she sang by herself in the third act was the culminating point of pathos after all. The scene was the "Fairies' Forest by Moonlight," and there Mademoiselle Zéphyr danced a *pas seul* round a giant mushroom, [with stage moonbeams playing upon her long fair curls in a very picturesque manner. Then came the song—the orchestra was hushed down to the utmost softness in order not to drown the little notes of the tiny voice that warbled so falteringly, yet so plaintively, the refrain—

"I see the light of the burning day  
Shine on the hill-tops far away,  
And gleam on the rippling river,—  
Follow me, fairies! follow me soon,  
Back to my palace behind the moon,  
Where I reign for ever and ever!"

A burst of the heartiest applause always rewarded this vocal effort on the part of little "Mademoiselle," who replied to it by graciously kissing her small hands to her appreciative audience; and then she entered with

due gravity on the most serious piece of professional work she had to do in the whole course of the evening. This was her grand dance—a dance she had been trained and tortured into by an active and energetic French ballet-mistress, who certainly had every reason to be proud of her tiny pupil. "Mademoiselle Zéphyr" skimmed the boards as lightly as a swallow—she leaped and sprang from point to point like a bright rosebud tossing in the air—she performed the most wonderful evolutions, always with the utmost grace and agility; and the final attitude in which she posed her little form at the conclusion of the dance, was so artistic, and withal so winsome and fascinating, that a positive roar of admiration and wonderment greeted her as the curtain fell. Poor little mite! My heart was full of pity as I left the theatre that night, for to give a child of that age the capricious applause of the public, instead of the tender nurture and fostering protection of a mother's arms, seemed to me both cruel and tragic. Some weeks elapsed, and the flitting figure and wistful little face of "Mademoiselle Zéphyr" still haunted me; till at last, with the usual impetuosity that characterizes many of my sex, I wrote to the manager of the theatre that boasted the "Wonderful Child-Dancer," and, frankly giving my name and a few other particulars, I asked him if he could tell me anything of the "Zéphyr's" parentage and history. I waited some days before an



answer came; but at last I received a very courteous letter from the manager in question, who assured me that I was not alone in the interest the talented child had awakened, but that he had reason to fear that the promise she showed thus early would be blighted by the extreme delicacy of her constitution. He added *en passant*, that he himself was considerably out of pocket by the "Zéphyr's" capricious health; that she had now been absent from the boards of his theatre for nearly a week; that on making enquiries, he had learned that the child was ill in bed and unable to rise, and that he had perforce stopped her salary and provided a substitute, an older girl not nearly so talented, who gave him a great deal of trouble and vexation. He furthermore mentioned in a postscript that the "Zéphyr's" real name was Winifred M—, that she was the daughter of a broken-down writer of *libretti*, and that her mother was dead, her only female relative being an elder sister whose character was far from reputable. He gave me the "Zéphyr's" address, a bad street in a bad neighbourhood; and assuring me that it was much better not to concern myself at all with the matter, he concluded his letter. His advice was sensible enough, and yet somehow I could not follow it. It is certainly a worldly-wise and safe course to follow, that of never enquiring into the fates of your unfortunate fellow-voyagers across the tempestuous sea.

of life; it saves trouble, it prevents your own feelings from being harrowed, and it is altogether a comfortable doctrine. But the sweet plaintive voice of the "Zéphyr" haunted my ears, the serious child-face, with its frame of golden curls, got into my dreams at night, and at last I made up my mind to go, accompanied by a friend, to that questionable street in a still more questionable neighbourhood, and make enquiries after the "Zéphyr's" health. After some trouble, I found the dirty lodging-house to which I had been directed, and stumbling up a very dark rickety flight of stairs, I knocked at a door, and asked if "Miss M——" was at home. The door was flung suddenly wide open, and a pretty girl of some seventeen years of age, with a quantity of fair hair falling loosely over her shoulders, and large blue eyes that looked heavy and tear-swollen, demanded in a somewhat hardened tone of voice, "Well; what do you want?" My companion answered, "A lady has come to know how your little sister is, the one that acts at the theatre." I then stepped forward and added as gently as I could, "I heard from Mr. ——, the manager, that the child was ill—is she better?"

The girl looked at me steadily without replying. Then suddenly, and as if with an effort, she said, "Come in." We passed into a dark and dirty room, ill-smelling, ill-ventilated, and scarcely furnished at all, and while I

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was trying to distinguish the objects in it, I heard the sound of a feeble singing. Could it be the "Zéphyr's" voice that sounded so far away, so faint and gasping? I listened, and my eyes filled unconsciously with tears. I recognized the tune and the refrain—

"Follow me, fairies! follow me soon  
Back to my palace behind the moon,  
Where I reign for ever and ever!"

"Where is she?" I asked, turning to the fair-haired girl, who stood still regarding me, half-wistfully, half-defiantly. She nodded her head towards a corner of the room, a corner which, though very dark, was still sheltered from any draught from either window or door, and there, on a miserable pallet bed, lay the poor little "Fairy Queen," tossing from side to side restlessly, her azure eyes wide open and glittering with feverish trouble, her lovely silken hair tangled and lustreless, and her tiny hands clenching and unclenching themselves mechanically and almost fiercely. But as she tossed about on her miserable pillow, she sang unceasingly, if such a feeble wailing might be called singing. I turned from the heartrending sight to the elder girl, who, without waiting to be asked, said abruptly, "She has got brain-fever. The doctor says she cannot live over to-morrow. It's all been brought on through over-work, and excitement and bad food. I can't help it. I know she has never had enough to eat. I am often half-starved my-

self. Father drinks up every penny that we earn. It's a good thing, *I* think, that Winnie will get out of it all soon. I wish I were dead myself, that I do!" And here the hardened look on the pretty face suddenly melted, the defiant flash in the eyes softened, and, flinging herself down by the little pallet, she broke into a passion of sobs and tears, crying out, "Poor Winnie—poor little Winnie!"

I prefer to pass over the remainder of this scene in silence. Suffice it to say that I did what I could to alleviate the physical sufferings of poor little "Zéphyr" and her unfortunate sister; and before leaving I earnestly entreated the now quite softened and still sobbing elder girl to let me know whether her sister grew better or worse. This she promised to do, and leaving my name and address, I kissed the hot little forehead of the fallen "Fairy Queen," and took my departure. The next morning I heard that the child was dead. She had died in the night, and with her last fluttering breath she had tried to sing her little fairy song. And so the human "Zéphyr" had floated away from the stage of this life, where fairy-land is only the dream of poets, to the unknown country—to the

"Island valley of Avilion,  
Where never wind blows loudly."

Thinking of her as I write, I almost fancy I see a *delicate* sprite on rainbow pinions flitting past me; I

almost hear the sweet child-voice rendered powerful and pure by the breath of immortality, singing softly—

"Follow me soon  
Back to my palace behind the moon,  
Where I reign for ever and ever!"

And who shall assert that she does not reign in some distant glorified region—the little queen of a chosen court of child-angels for whom this present world was too hard and sorrowful?

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MY WONDERFUL WIFE.

AN EXTRAVAGANZA IN SMOKE.

*The Hired Baby, etc.*

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## MY WONDERFUL WIFE.

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### CHAPTER I.

SHE was really a wonderful woman!—I always said so! She captivated me with a smile; she subjugated my frail and trembling soul with a glance. She took such utter possession of me from the very moment I set eyes on her that I had no longer any will of my own; in fact, to this day I don't know how I came to marry her. I have a hazy idea that *she* married *me*. I think it is very likely, knowing, as I know now, what a powerful, sweeping-away-of-all-obstacles sort of intellect she has. But when I first saw her she was a glorious girl! One of those "fine" girls, don't you know?—with plump shoulders, round arms, ample bosom, full cheeks, good teeth and quantities of hair—a girl with "go," and "pluck," and plenty of "style;" just the kind of creature for a small, mild, rather nervous man like me. She had just come back from the Highlands, where she had "brought down" a superb stag with a single unerring shot from her gun; and all the blowsy glow of

the Scotch breeze was about her, and all the scent of the gorse and heather seemed to come out in whiffs from her cropped and frizzy "fringe." She talked—ye gods! how amazingly she talked—she laughed, till the superabundant excess of her immense vitality made me positively envious! She danced with the vigour and swing of a stalwart Amazon—danced till my brain swung round and round in wild gyrations to the delirious excitement of her ceaseless twirl. For *she* never tired, never felt faint, never got giddy—not she! She was in sound health, mark you; sound and splendid physical condition, and had appetite enough for two ordinary men of middle size; moreover, she ate a mixture of things that *no* ordinary man could possibly eat without future spasms. I watched her that night we met (we were at one of those "at homes" with a small "dancing" in the corner of the card which help to make up the melancholy pleasures of London social life)—I watched her, I say, in breathless surprise and admiration, as between every couple of dances she ate three ices and a plateful of lobster-salad,—I stared at her in unfeigned ecstasy and awe when at supper she made such short work of the mayonnaise, the salmon and cucumber, the veal and ham pie, the cream puffs, the red jelly, the cheese and sardines, the champagne and tipsy-cake, and then *more* ice-cream! I hastened to provide her with two cups of coffee, one after the other,



and a thrill of wonder and delight ran through me when, in reply to my interested query, "Does not coffee keep you awake at night?" she gave a loud and cheerful laugh at my simplicity and replied:


"Me? Why, I sleep like a top, and wake as fresh as a daisy."

Fresh as a daisy! How suggestively beautiful! I believed her thoroughly. Such a physique as she had, such a clear skin, such a bright, full, almost wild eye! Health radiated from her; her very aspect was invigorating as well as commanding, and I was completely overpowered and taken captive by her superb masterfulness and self-assertion. She was so utterly unlike the women in Walter Scott's novels, you know—the women our great-grandfathers used to admire—those gentle, dignified, retiring, blushing personages, who always wanted men to fight for them and protect them—poor wretched weaklings *they* were, to be sure! Of course, all that sort of thing was very pretty and made a man think himself of some consequence and use in the world; but it was great nonsense when you come to consider it. Why should men be at the bother of looking after women? They can look after themselves, and pretty sharply too; they have proved it over and over again. And as to business, they beat a man hollow in their keen aptitude for money transactions!

Well, as I was saying, this splendid girl, Honoria.

Maggs—that was her name—bowled me over completely—“knocked me into a cocked hat,” as I heard the Duke of Havilands remark the other day at a race-meeting, and as he is a royal and exalted individual I suppose it is the most aristocratic expression in vogue. One must always strive to imitate one’s betters; and he is unquestionably my better by several thousands of pounds, for nowadays, as we are all aware, we only rank superiority in mind by superfluity of cash. I recognized in this same Honoria Maggs, my fate, from whom there was no escaping; I followed her from “at home” to “at home,” from ball to ball, from concert to concert, from race-course to race-course, with an unflagging pertinacity that bordered on mania—a pertinacity which surprised everybody, myself included. I don’t know why I did it, I’m sure. If it will gratify the “spiritualists,” I am quite willing to set it down to “astral influence.” On the other hand, if it will oblige the celebrated Dr. Charcot, of Paris, I am ready to believe it was hypnotism. She “drew” me—yes, that is the correct term. Honoria Maggs “drew” me on, and I allowed myself to be “drawn,” regardless of future consequences. At last things came to the usual crisis. I proposed. I made a full and frank statement of the extent of my financial resources, carefully explained how much I had to my credit in the bank, and how much was invested in Consols, all with an agreeably

satisfactory result. I was accepted, and for the next month or two went about receiving the congratulations of my friends, and inanely believing myself to be the happiest of men. During our courtship Honoria was not in the least bit sentimental; she was far too sensible for that. She never wanted a kiss in a dark passage; she would have been justly enraged had I suggestively trodden on her toes under the table. She never wished to stop and look at the moon on her way home from any neighbour's house or place of amusement; not a bit of it! She was a thoroughly practical, capable, healthy female, utterly devoid of romance. I was glad of this, because I had been lately reading in the magazines and newspapers that romance of any kind was unwholesome, and I did not want an unwholesome wife. And she was tremendously healthy; there was no sickly mawkishness or die-away languor about *her*! She wrote a novel—yes, and published it too; but it was not rubbish, you understand. By rubbish, I mean it was not full of silly sentiments, like Byron's verses or Shakespeare's plays; it had no idyllic-sublime stuff in it. It was a sporting novel, full of slap-dash vigour and stable slang; a really jolly, go-ahead, over-hill-and-dale, cross-country sort of book, with just a thread of a plot in it, which didn't matter, and an abrupt wind-up that left you in the lurch, wondering what it was all about; in short, the kind of reading that



doesn't bother a fellow's brain. It was a great success, partly because she, Honoria Maggs, found out the names of all the critics and "beat them up," as she frankly said, in her own irresistibly dominant way, and partly because the Duke of Havilands (I mentioned him just now) swore it was "the most doosid clever thing he had ever clapped eyes on in print." Her name was in everybody's mouth for a short time, and in the full flush of her glory she went off to the moors partridge-shooting, and "bagged" such a quantity of game that the fact was chronicled in all the society journals; particularly that smart paper that always abuses our venerable Queen in its delightful columns. She rose higher than ever in popular estimation. Redfern implored her to let him "build" her gowns; all the rival tailors sent her their circulars and estimates free of charge; the various makers of soap entreated her to use their different specimens regularly every morning; the photographers offered her "sittings" gratis, and she was very nearly becoming a "professional beauty," as well as a crack shot and literary genius. Yes, I know "*genius*" is a big word; but if Honoria Maggs did *not* have genius, then, I ask, what *did* she have? What active demon, or legion of demons possessed her? But I anticipate. I have just remarked that she was at this time nearly becoming a "professional beauty," and in that character might possibly have gone on the stage, there to get rid

of some of that amazing energy of which she had such a superabundance, but that *I* stepped in and cut matters short by marrying her. Yes; I suppose I *did* marry her. I must have done so, though, as I before hinted, it seems to me that she was the imperative, and I the passive party in the arrangement. I know my responses in church at the marriage service were very inaudible, and that hers were so distinctly uttered that they echoed through the chancel and almost frightened me by their decisive resonance. But she always had a resonant voice; good lungs, you know—not a touch of consumption *there!*

It was a pretty wedding, people said. It may have been. I know nobody looked at or thought of *me*. I was the least part of the ceremony—the bride was everything; the bride always *is* everything. And yet the bridegroom is an absolute necessity; he is wanted, is he not? The affair would not go on well without him? Then *why* is he, as a rule, so obstinately ignored and despised by his friends and relatives at his own wedding? This is one of the perplexing problems of social life that I shall never, never understand!

We had a great number of presents. My wife, of course, had the most; and one among her numerous marriage gifts struck me as singularly inappropriate. It was a cigar and ash tray, in oak and silver, very prettily engraved with her monogram, and it came from the

friend she had been staying with in the Highlands, when she had brought down the stag with the six-branched antlers; antlers which now, tipped with silver, were destined to adorn the entrance-hall of our new house. When we were driving away from the scene of our bridal festivities, and endeavouring to shield ourselves from the shower of rice that was being pelted through the carriage-windows by our over zealous well-wishers, I remarked playfully:

"That was a singular gift for you, my darling, from Mrs. Stirling of Glen Ruach—she must have meant it for *me!*"

"Which?" demanded Honoria abruptly. (She never wasted words.)

"The cigar and ash tray," I replied.

"Singular?" and the newly-made partner of my joys and sorrows turned upon me with a brilliant smile in her fine eyes. "Not singular at all. She knows I smoke."

*Smoke!* A feeble gurgle or gasp of astonishment came from my lips and I fell back a little in the carriage.

"Smoke? *You* smoke, Honoria? You—you——"

She laughed aloud. "Smoke? I should think so! Why, you silly old boy, didn't you know that? Haven't you smelt my tobacco before now? Real Turkish!—here you are!"

And she produced from her pocket a mannish-look-

ing leather case embossed with silver, full of the finest "golden-hair" brand so approved by connoisseurs, and having at one side the usual supply of rice-paper wherewith to make cigarettes. She rolled up one very deftly as she spoke, and held it out to me.

"Have it?" she asked carelessly; but I made a sign of protest and she put it back in the case with another laugh.

"Very rude you are!" she declared. "Very! You refuse the first cigarette made for you by your wife!"

This was a stab, and I felt it keenly.

"I will take it presently, Honoria," I stammered nervously; "but—but—my darling, my sweetest girl, I do not like you to smoke!"

"Don't you?" and she surveyed me with the utmost nonchalance. "Sorry for that! But it can't be helped now! *You* smoke—I've seen you at it."

"Yes, yes, *I* do; but I am a man, and—and——"

"And I am a woman!" finished Honoria composedly. "And we twain have just been made *one*! So I have as much right to smoke as you, old boy, being part and parcel of you; and we'll enjoy our cigars together after dinner."

"Cigars!"

"Yes; or cigarettes—which you please. It doesn't matter in the least to me; I'm accustomed to both!"

I sat dumb and bewildered. I could not realize


the position. I stared at my bride, and suddenly observed a masculine imperviousness in her countenance that surprised me; a determination of chin that I wondered I had not noticed before. A vague feeling of alarm ran through me like a cold shiver. Had I made a mistake after all in my choice of a wife? And was this fine bouncing creature—this splendidly-developed, vigorously healthy specimen of womanhood going to prove too much for me? I recoiled from my own painful thoughts. I had always laughed to scorn those weak-spirited men who allowed themselves to be mastered by their wives. Now, was *I* also destined to become a laughing-stock for others? And should *I* also be ruled with the female rod of iron? Never, never, *never!* I would rebel—I would protest! But in the meantime—well, I was just married, and, as a perfectly natural consequence, I dared not speak my mind!

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## CHAPTER II.

THAT evening—the evening of my marriage day—I beheld a strange and remarkable spectacle. It was after dinner in our private sitting-room (we had engaged apartments at a very charming hotel down at Tenby, where we meant to pass the honeymoon), and my wife had just left me, saying she would return in an instant. I drew a chair up to the window and gazed at the sea; and, after a little while, I felt in my pocket and pulled out my cigar-case. I looked at it affectionately, but I resisted the temptation to smoke. I made up my mind that I would not be the first to suggest the idea to Honoria. For if she *had* fallen into such an unwomanly vice, then it was clearly my duty as her husband to get her out of it. Here some captious readers may say: “Well, if you didn’t mind her going about with a gun, you ought to have been prepared for her having other masculine accomplishments as well.” Now, just allow me to explain. I *did* mind her going about with a gun; I minded it very much; but then, I was always an old-fashioned sort of fellow with old-fashioned notions (I am trying to break myself of them by degrees), and one of these notions was a deep respect and chivalrous

homage for the ladies of the English aristocracy. I believed them to be the *ne plus ultra* of everything noble and grand in woman, and I felt that whatever *they* did *must* be right, and not only right, but perfectly well-bred, since it is their business and prerogative to furnish models of excellent behaviour to all their sex. And when Honoria was still Miss Maggs, and made her mark as a sportswoman, she was only imitating the example (for I read it in the society papers) of three of the most exalted ladies of title in the land. Moreover, I thought that after all it was merely a high-spirited girl's freak, just to show that she could, on occasion, shoot as well as a man. I felt quite sure that when Miss Maggs became Mrs. Hatwell-Tribkin (William Hatwell-Tribkin is my name), she would, to speak poetically, lay aside the gun for the needle, and the game bag for the household linen. Such was my limited conception of the female temperament and intelligence. But I know better now! And since I have learned that the "highest ladies in the land" *smoke* as well as shoot—well, I will not say openly what I think! I will merely assure those who may be interested in my feelings on the subject, that I have now no old-fashioned partiality whatever for *such* aristocratic personages; let them do as they like and sink to whatever level they choose, only for Heaven's sake let them *not* be taken as the best examples we can show of England's wives and



mothers! Several persons who have recently aired their opinions in the roomy columns of the *Daily Telegraph* (all honour to that blessed journal, which provides so wide and liberal a pasture land *gratis* for sheep-like souls to graze upon!) have advocated smoking for women as a perfectly harmless and innocent enjoyment, tending to promote pleasant good-fellowship between the sexes. All I can say is, let one of these special pleaders marry an inveterate woman-smoker, and try it!

The evening of one's marriage day is not exactly an evening to quarrel upon, and so I could not quarrel with Honoria, when she treated me to the amazing spectacle alluded to at the commencement of this chapter—the spectacle of herself, transformed. She came back into the sitting-room with that cheerful, wholesome laugh of hers (Oscar Wilde and others might think it a trifle too loud, still it was lively), and said:

“*Now* I'm comfortable! Got a chair for me? That's right! Push it up in that corner, and let's be chummy!”

I gazed at her as she spoke, and my voice died away in my throat; I could almost feel my hair rising slowly from my scalp in amazement and horror. What—*what* did my Honoria—my bride, whom I had lately seen a rustling vision of white silk and lace and orange-blossoms, what did she look like? Like a *man*! Ye gods! yes, though she had petticoats on—like a *man*!

She had changed her pretty travelling dress for a short and extremely scanty brown tweed skirt; with this she wore a very racy-looking jacket of coarse flannel, patterned all over with large horse shoes on a blue ground. On her head she had perched a red smoking-cap with a long tassel that bobbed over her left eyebrow, and she surveyed me as she sat down, with an air of bland unconsciousness, as though her costume were the most natural thing in the world. I said nothing; she did not expect me to say anything, I suppose. She glanced at the sea, shining with a lovely purple in the evening light, and said briefly:

"Looks dull rather, doesn't it? Wants a few racers about. Fancy! I had no yachting this year,—all the boys went away to Ireland instead."

"What boys?" I murmured faintly, still staring at her with dazed bewildered eyes. She was a boy herself, or very like one!

Again that cheerful laugh vibrated in my ears.

"What boys? Good gracious, Willie, if I were to run over all their names, it would be like an hotel visitors' list! I mean *the* boys. All the men who used to take me about, don't you know?"

A kind of resolution fired my blood at this.

"They will hardly take you about *now*," I said, with, I hope, a gentle severity. "You are married now, Honoria, and it will be *my* proud privilege to take you

about, so that we shall be able to dispense with the *boys*."

"Oh, certainly, if you like," she replied, smiling unconcernedly; "only you'll soon get tired of it, I expect! We can't always hunt in couples—Darby and Joan sort of thing—awfully bad form; must go different ways sometimes. You'll get sick to death of always doing the different seasons with me."

"Never, Honoria!" I said firmly. "I shall be perfectly happy with you for ever at my side; perfectly contented to be seen always in your company!"

"Really!" and she raised her eyebrows a little, then laughed again, and added coaxingly: "Don't be spooney, Will, there's a good fellow! I do hate being spooned upon,—*you* know! Let us be as jolly as you like; but though we *are* just married, don't let people take us for a pair of fools!"

"I fail to understand your meaning, Honoria," I said rather vexedly. "Why *should* we be taken for fools? I really cannot see——"

"Oh, *you* know," laughed my boyish-looking wife, diving into one of her capacious jackets-pockets in search of a *something*,—I instinctively knew what it was. Yes, there, out it came! No cigarette-case this time, but one full of *cigars*, and I at once rose to the occasion with a manly fortitude that, I trust, did not ill become me.

"Honoriam," I said, "Honoriam, my dear, my darling! *Do* oblige me by *not* smoking; not this evening, at any rate! I shall not be able to bear the sight of a cigar in *your* sweet mouth; I shall not indeed. I *am* a 'spooney' fellow, perhaps, but I love you and admire you, my dear, too much to let you appear even before *my* eyes at a disadvantage. It is not good for your health, I assure you! It will spoil your pretty teeth and play havoc with your nerves; and, besides this, Honoriam, it is *not* a nice thing for a woman, especially an English woman. It is all very well for ugly Russian matrons and withered old Spanish gipsies, but for a young, bonnie, fresh creature like you, Honoriam, it is not the thing, believe me! Moreover, it gives you a masculine appearance, which is not at all becoming. I am in earnest, my dear! I want my wife to be above all things womanly, and now we are married I can tell you frankly that I hope you will never take a *gun* in your hands again. It was very plucky of you to show that you *could* shoot, you know, Honoriam. I admired your spirit, but, of course, I always *knew* you only did it for fun. A woman can never be an actual follower of sport, any more than she can become a practised smoker, without losing the beautiful prestige of modesty and dignity with which Nature has endowed her."

Thus far Honoriam had listened to me in absolute silence, a smile on her lips and her cigar-case still open

in her hand. Now, however, she gave way to unfeigned and irrepressible laughter.

"Upon my word," she exclaimed, "I never heard a better bit of sentimental palaver than that! Willie, you *are* a goose! For pity's sake, don't talk such old-fashioned nonsense to me. I'm past it. Georgie might like that sort of thing" (Georgie was my wife's youngest sister, a timid little morsel of a woman I had always despised), "but I thought you knew *me* better. Come, you're longing to have a smoke yourself, you know you are! Here!" and she held out her cigar-case with the most brilliant smile in the world. "You won't? Don't be a mule, now!" and she whipped out of her side-pocket a tiny silver match-box, lit a cigar, and again proffered it to me. I took it mechanically. I should have been a brute to refuse her on *that* evening of all evenings; but I still remonstrated feebly.

"Honor, I don't like it——"

"Don't like what?" she inquired mirthfully. "The cigar? Then you don't know the flavour of good tobacco!"

"No, no, I don't mean the cigar," I said, puffing at it slowly as I spoke; "it is an exceedingly choice cigar, in fact, remarkably so; but I don't like *your* smoking one."

And I watched her in melancholy amaze as she placed a similar cigar to my own between her rosy

lips and began to puff away in evident delight. "I don't like your smoking," I repeated earnestly. "No, Honoria, I do *not*! I shall never like it!"

"Then you're very selfish," she returned, with perfect good-humour. "You wish to deprive your wife of a pleasure you indulge in yourself."

Now, *there* was a way of putting it!

"But, Honoria," I urged, "surely, surely men are permitted to do many things which, pardon me, are hardly fitted for the finer susceptibilities of women?"

She flicked off the ash from her "weed" with her little finger, settled her smoking-cap, and smiled a superior smile.

"Not a bit of it!" she replied. "Once, in those detestable 'good old times' some people are always talking about, men *were* permitted to keep women out of every sort of enjoyment, and nice tyrants they were! But now, *nous avons changé tout cela*"—she had a very charming French accent by the way—"and we are no longer the drudges, housekeepers, general servants and nurses that adorned that bygone age of darkness! We are the equals of man. What he can do, we can do as well, and often better; we are his companions now, not his slaves. For instance, here am I—your wife—am I not?"

"Just so, Honoria," I murmured. What an excellent

cigar she had given me, to be sure! "You are indeed my wife, my very dearly beloved wife——"

"Don't!" she interrupted. "It sounds like an epitaph!"

I laughed,—it was impossible to help laughing. She was such a whimsical creature, such an extraordinary girl! She laughed too, and went on:

"Suppose I had lived and suppose *you* had lived in the 'good old times,' Willie, do you know what we should have done?"

I shook my head drowsily in the negative, and blinked my eyes at her in bland admiration. (That cigar was really first-class, and it was gradually having a softening influence on my brain.)

"We should have *died* of dulness," she declared emphatically. "Just *died* of it! We could never have borne it. Fancy! I should have been shut up nearly all day in the house, with a huge apron on, sorting jams and pickles, and counting over the sheets and pillow-cases like a silly old noodle, and *you* would have tumbled home drunk regularly every afternoon, and gone to bed under the table every evening!"

She nodded her head decisively and the tassel of her smoking-cap came down over her nose. She cast it off defiantly and looked at me with such a twinkling mischief in her eyes that I fairly roared.

"That last part of the daily entertainment would

have been lively, Honoria"—I giggled convulsively—"lively for *me* at any rate!"

"No, it wouldn't," she said. "You've no idea how tired you'd have got of being continually drunk! It might be all very well for a time, but you would have wanted a change. And in that period, there was *no* change possible! A man and his wife had to jog on together for ever and a day—Amen to it!—without a single distraction to mar the domestic bliss of the awful years! Domestic bliss—ugh! it makes me shudder!"

I grew suddenly serious. "Why, surely, Honoria," I said, "you believe in domestic bliss, don't you?"

"Certainly not! Good gracious, no! What on earth is domestic bliss all about? I've studied it, I assure you. I'll tell you what it is. In winter, the united members of a large family sit solemnly round the fire and roast chestnuts to the tune of 'Home, sweet Home,' played by the youngest boy on the old harmonium (harmonium that belonged to darling dear grand-mamma, you know!); in summer they all go down to the sea-side (still fondly united) and sit in a ring on the hot sand, reading antediluvian novels, quite happy! and *so* good, and *so* devoted to one another, and *so* ugly, most of them; no wonder they can never get any other company than their own!"

She puffed away at her cigar quite fiercely, and her

eyes twinkled again. As for me, I was off once more in an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"Honor! Honor!" I gasped, "what a droll girl you are; where *do* you get your ideas from?"

"Can't imagine," she replied smilingly. "They come. Inspiration, I suppose, as the towzle-haired 'geniuses' say. But I *am* jolly—I believe there's no denying *that*. You'll find me quite a good fellow, don't you know, when you've once got accustomed to my ways. But I may as well tell you at once that it's no use your expecting me to give up my smoke. It's possible I may get tired of shooting; when I do I'll let you know. And one word more, old boy—don't preach at me again, will you? Can't bear being preached at; never could. Say right out what you mean without sentiment, and we'll see how we can settle it. I never lose temper—waste of time. Much better to come to a calm understanding about everything—think so?"

I agreed heartily, and would have kissed her, but that vile cigar stuck out of her mouth and prevented me. Besides, I was smoking my own particular "vile" and it was no use disturbing myself or her just then. Moreover, did she not evince a wholesome dislike of sentiment? And is not kissing a sentimental business, totally unsuited to the advanced intelligence of the advanced woman of our advancing day?

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## CHAPTER III.

HONEYMOONS are generally supposed to be the briefest of all moons, and mine was particularly so, as it only lasted a fortnight. I will not here attempt to describe the chronic state of wonder, doubt, affection, dismay, admiration, and vague alarm in which I passed it. It seemed to me that I was all the time in the company of a very cheerful good-tempered lad just home from his college for the holidays. I knew this "lad" was a woman and my wife, but somehow, as the Americans say, I couldn't "fix" it. At the end of our recognized "spooney" season, we returned to our own house in Kensington, a comfortable dwelling, luxuriously furnished, and provided with all the modern improvements, electric light included, and settled down to the serious realization of our married existence. We had hosts of friends; too many friends, I thought. We certainly could not boast of a "quiet" home, neither could we be accused of indulging in the guilty tameness of "domestic bliss." All "the boys" fraternized with me; those "boys" who before Honoria's marriage had been, she assured me, like so many brothers to her. They were most of them young men, none of them

above thirty, and I was approaching my fortieth birthday. Moreover, I had the sundry cares of the business of living upon me; the "Battle of Life" (I have to thank the noble *Daily Telegraph* for this admirable and entirely new expression) had to be fought by me single-handed, and this gave me the appearance of being older than I actually was. In fact "the boys" seemed to consider me a sort of harmless *paterfamilias*; but I myself often wondered whether I was not more like the meek proprietor of an exceptionally convenient hotel, where bachelors under thirty might find board, lodging and good entertainment, free of charge. At first, I did not feel my position so keenly, because really "the boys" were not bad fellows. They were like young colts, frisky and full of fun. They were fools undoubtedly, but they were not knaves, and to this day I don't think there was an ounce of wit among them, so that they lacked the means to be seriously mischievous; in fact there was no malice about them, they were too absolutely silly for that—more like Brobdingnagian babies than men. They had a great many old associations with Honoria. Many of them had known her long before I did, and one of these declared to me joyously that "it was no end of a lark, dontcherknow, to think she was married!" I would have sought an explanation from this vivacious and muscular youth (he was over six feet high) as to his reasons for considering it "no end

of a lark" but that he was such an utterly brainless "boy," such a cheerfully-confessed and openly-advertized donkey, that I saw at once it would be no use asking him any questions that did not lead up somehow or other to a discussion on lawn-tennis, which was the only subject in earth or heaven that appealed to his minute fragment of intellect. There was just one other individual who surpassed him in fatuous foolishness; this was a "boy" with heavy moustaches, whose sole delight in life was to "scull." Sculling up and down the river, sculling here, sculling there (with a very useless skull of his own, Heaven knows! excuse the unintentional pun), his pride and joy were concentrated in the steady work of strengthening his muscles and reducing his brain by swift degrees from the little to the infinitely less. He had fine eyes, this "boy," and his moustaches, "long, silky and sweeping" (*vide* "Ouida"), threw all little school girls and inexperienced housemaids into ecstasies of admiration. He looked very well in his white boating flannels; so well, that he was, by some rash persons who did not know him, judged intelligent, but, to speak with exactitude, a more hopeless idiot never existed. He was such an overpoweringly polite idiot too, exceedingly deferential to me, and automatically courteous to every one, though he always maintained that delightfully funny air of coy reserve which very good-looking young men sometimes assume, that air which is meant as a

mild touch-me-not or warner-off to over-susceptible ladies,—for these sort of absurd fellows generally flatter themselves that every woman who sees them is bound to fall in love with them on the spot. This particular “boy” was constantly in and out of our house; he liked Honoria because she made such game of him and his stand-offish manner. I suppose the poor devil was so flattered everywhere else (on account of those moustaches) that he found some comfort in being ridiculed now and then. And my wife had a great talent for ridicule, an immense and ever-developing talent; she “chaffed” people unmercifully; in fact, after the novelty of our marriage had worn off a bit, she began to “chaff” *me*. I am bound to confess I did not quite like this, but I forbore to complain,—she had such high spirits, I thought, and she did not really mean to wound my feelings.

However, taking it all in all, home was not the home I had hoped for. There was no repose in it,—no relief from the business fatigues and worries of the day. And the whole place was always horribly redolent of tobacco—tobacco-smoke permeated every room in it, including even the big dining-room—and the smell of cigars was in my nostrils morning, noon and night. All those “boys” smoked, of course; they were very friendly, and used to sit chatting away with me after dinner till long past midnight (Honoria being of the party). ❧

could scarcely turn them out without being rude, and naturally I did not wish to be rude to my wife's old friends. I had my own friends also, but they were men of a different stamp. They were older, more serious, more settled in their modes of life; they liked to talk on the politics, progress and science of the age; and though they admired Honoria (for she could converse well on any subject) they could not get on with the "boys," no, not with any of them. So one by one they dropped off, and by-and-by a sort of desolate shut-out feeling began to steal over me,—and I wondered ruefully if I should be obliged to go on living like this for the rest of my days? I sat down in my arm-chair one evening and seriously considered my position. Honoria was out; she had gone to supper with her friend Mrs. Stirling, of Glen Ruach (the misguided woman who had presented her with that wedding-gift of the cigar and ash tray), who was staying in London for a couple of weeks, and I knew they and their "set" would make a night of it. I had not been asked to join the party—I was evidently not wanted. I sat, as I said, in my chair, and looked at the fire; it was cold weather, and the wind whistled drearily outside the windows, and I took to hard and earnest *thinking*. Was I happy in my married life? No! most emphatically *not*. But why? I asked myself. What prevented my happiness? Honoria was a bright woman, a clever

woman, handsome, good-tempered and cheerful as the day, never ill, never dull, never cross. What on earth was my complaint? I sighed heavily; I felt I was unreasonable; and yet, I had certainly missed something out of my life—something I felt the want of now. Was it the frequent visitations of “the boys” that fretted my mind? No, not exactly; for, as I said before, they were thoroughly harmless fellows. And as for Honoria herself, whatever her faults (or what I considered her faults) might be, she was good as gold, with a frank, almost blunt straightforwardness and honesty about her that was really admirable—in fact, she was the kind of woman to knock down a man who would have dared to offer her any insult; and thus far her “mannishness” set her above all suspicion of deceit or infidelity. It was impossible to doubt her word—she never told a lie—and she had a sort of military-disciplined idea of honour, rare to find in the feminine nature. Yes, her sterling virtue was unquestionable. What qualities, then, did she lack? Why did I feel that she was in a way removed from me, and that instead of having a woman by my side, I had a sort of hybrid human growth which was neither man nor woman,—which confused and perplexed me instead of helping and comforting me, and which filled me with surprise rather than respect? Again I sighed, and stirring the smouldering fire into a blaze watched its flickering flashes on the wall of the room.

It was a large room—we called it the library, because there were books in it. Not rare volumes by any means, still what there were I liked; in fact they were mostly mine. My wife read nothing but the newspapers; she devoured the *Referee* on Sundays, and she took the *Sporting Times* because she always had certain bets on certain racing events. Needless to say I objected to her betting, but with no result beyond the usual laugh, and the usual, "Don't be a goose, Willie; it's all right! I never bet with *your* money!" Which was true enough. She had turned out another sporting novel at a "dead heat," as she herself expressed it; the publisher had paid her well for it, and she certainly had every right to do as she liked with her own earnings. Moreover, she generally won her bets, that was the odd part of it; she seemed to have an instinctive faculty for winning. Her losses were always small, her gains always large. In fact, as I have already remarked, she was a wonderful woman!

*Apropos* of this last novel of hers, I reflected uneasily that I had not yet read a word of it. It was only just published, I had seen no reviews of it, and she seemed to attach no importance to it herself. She had no real love for literature; she called all the ancient classic writers "old bores," and all the works of the after-giants, such as Shakespeare, Byron, Shelley, Walter Scott, Dickens, or Thackeray, "stuff and rubbish." *She*

wrote a novel as she wrote a letter—almost without taking thought, and certainly without correction. She would hand the proofs over to one of “the boys” who knew all about sporting terms, that he might see whether her slang was correct, and when his hall-mark said (as it did once, for I saw it pencilled on the margin of a chapter), “Bully for you!” off the whole thing went to the publisher without further anxiety or trouble on her part. And when people said to me, sweetly, “Your wife is quite a literary genius!” in the usual humbugging way of polite society, I was very well aware that they didn’t mean it; I knew in my very heart of hearts that Honoria, judged strictly from an art and letters point of view, was a *fraud*,—positively a *fraud*! The thought stabbed me to the soul, but still I had to think it if I would be at peace with my own conscience. I am not a clever man myself, yet I know very well what female literary “genius” is. We have it in the poems of Elizabeth Barrett and the romances of Georges Sand, and when we consider the imperishable work of such women as these, the sporting novels of even a Honoria Hatwell-Tribkin sink into shadowy insignificance! And I am a great believer in woman’s literary capability. I think that, given a woman with a keen instinct, close observation and large sympathies, she ought to be able to produce greater masterpieces of literature than a man. But there is no necessity for her to part with her womanly

gentleness because she writes. No, for it is just that subtle charm of her finer sex that should give the superiority to her work—not the stripping herself of all those delicate and sensitive qualities bestowed on her by Nature, and the striving to ape that masculine roughness which is precisely what we want eliminated from all high ideals of art. But, as I have hinted, it was absurd to call *my* wife “literary;” she was a mere scribbler of sporting platitudes, and I have only been led on to speak of her entering the ranks of pen and ink at all, because (on referring to some back numbers of the *Daily Telegraph*) I understand that there are a few uninstructed persons about in the shape of “London clergymen” and others, who think that women who write books are *therefore* rendered unwomanly. Never was there a greater mistake. One of the sweetest and most womanly women I ever met is rapidly coming to the front as a most gifted and brilliant writer. She neither smokes nor keeps late hours; she does not hunt, or fish, or shoot; she dresses exquisitely; her voice is “low and sweet” as “Annie Laurie’s,” and the roughest man of her particular circle—one who has been called the “Ursa Major” of literature—becomes the softest and must courtly *preux chevalier* in her presence, much to the relief and satisfaction of all his and her friends. To my idea the “mannish” woman should be altogether debarred from entering into the profession of literature,

inasmuch as she can do no good whatever in it. She takes a wrong view of life; her theories are all at sixes and sevens; she mixes up her rights and privileges with those of the coarser sex till she does not know which is which; she has wilfully blunted all her finer susceptibilities, and is therefore practically useless as a thinker-out of high problems, or a consoler to her fellow-creatures. Literature of itself does not unsex a woman; its proper influence is a softening, dignifying and ennobling one; therefore if, in that calling, a woman proves herself unwomanly in her speech, manners and customs, you may be sure the unsexing process was pretty well completed before she ever took up the pen.

I was still sitting before the fire in melancholy mood, musing over what, reasonably or unreasonably, I felt to be the desolation of my wedded existence, when I heard a latch-key turn in the lock of the street door—another instant, and a firm step marching along the outer passage assured me of my wife's return. I glanced at the clock—it was close upon midnight. I had been alone since dinner-time, alone and melancholy, and I felt more injured and irritated than I cared to admit to myself. A strong whiff of tobacco heralded Honoria's approach; she entered, clad in a long buttoned-up ulster and cloth jockey cap, her eyes brilliant, her cheeks flushed, and a half-smoked-out cigar in her mouth. A sudden anger possessed me. I looked up, but did not

speak. She threw off her cloak and cap, and stood before me in evening dress—a clinging gown of grey velvet, touched here and there with silver embroidery.

“Well!” she said cheerfully, removing her cigar from her lips to puff out a volume of smoke, and then sticking it in again.

“Well,” I responded somewhat sullenly.

Her bright eyes opened wide.

“Hullo! All down in the mouth and low in the dumps—eh, old boy?” and she poked the fire into a blaze. “What’s up? Stocks queer? Bank broken? Shares gone down? You look like an unfortunate publisher!”

“Do I?” and I averted my gaze from hers and stared gloomily into the fire.

“Yes,” and she gave that ringing laugh that somehow had latterly begun to jar my nerves. “*You* know the man!—bad-times-no-sale-out-of-season-no-demand-in-the-provinces sort of fellow! Awful!—and all the while he’s pocketing profits on the sly. Funny expression he gets after long practice. *You’ve* got it exactly just now!”

“Thanks!” I said curtly.

She surveyed me wonderingly.

“Got the toothache?” she asked with some commiseration in her voice.

“No.”

"Headache?"

"No."

She gave me a meditative side-glance, still smoking, then nodded in a wise and confidential manner.

"*I* know—indigestion!"

This was too much; I jumped up from my chair and faced her.

"No, Honoria," I said in accents that trembled with suppressed excitement—"it is *not* indigestion! It is nothing of the kind, madam! You see before you a broken, dispirited man—a miserable, homeless wretch who hasn't a moment's peace of his life—who is disgusted—yes, *disgusted*, Mrs. Tribkin—at the way you go on! You are out every day, more often with others than with me; and if you are not out, the house is full of gorging, lounging, grinning young fools, who no doubt laugh at me (and at you too, for that matter) in their sleeves. You smoke like—like—a *dragoon*! Yes!"—I spluttered this word out desperately, determined to bring her to book somehow—"and you behave yourself altogether in a fashion that *I* consider indecorous and unbecoming to a lady in your position. I will not have it, Honoria! I will NOT have it! I have borne it as long as I *can* bear it, and my patience is quite exhausted! I tell you I am sick of the smell of tobacco—I loathe the very sight of a cigar! Smoking is a detestable, vulgar, and unwholesome vice, and as far as

*I* am concerned I have done with it for ever! *I used* to like a quiet smoke in the evening"—here my voice took on a plaintive, almost tearful, wail—"but now—now, Honoria, I *hate* it! *You* have worked this change in me! I have seen you smoking, morning, noon and night, till my very soul has been nauseated by such an unnatural and unfeminine spectacle! You have robbed me of what was once my own peculiar enjoyment—and I can endure it no longer! I cannot, Honoria! I will NOT . . .!"

I gasped for breath, and sinking back again in my chair, glared steadily at the wall. I was afraid to encounter the whimsical look of my wife's eye, lest I should give way to convulsions of wild laughter—laughter which really would not have been far off the verge of tears, I was so thoroughly shaken from my usual self-control.

"Whe-e-e-w!"—and the long and dismally drawn-out whistle she gave made me glance at her for a second. She had taken her cigar from her mouth, and was regarding me fixedly. "Good gracious, Willie! I never did! Look here, you know this won't do at all! I never lose temper—it's no use your trying to make me. *I* see what it is. You've got the fidgets, and you want to quarrel and make me cry and go off into a fit of hysterics, and then pet me and bring me round again. But it isn't the least bit of good attempting it.

I *can't* do it—I *can't* work hysterics anyhow! I never could since I grew up. I might manage to scream once, if that would oblige you, but I *know* it would scare the people next door! Now, don't rant and rave like Wilson Barrett when he's got his red Chatterton wig on, but be calm and sensible, and tell us what's the matter."

She spoke like a friendly young man, and I peered at her doubtfully.<sup>1</sup>

"Honoria," I began, then my feelings got the better of me again, and I muttered—"No, no! it is too much! I will NOT—I *cannot* be calm!"

"Then go to bed," she said soothingly, laying one hand on my shoulder, and looking quite benignantly at me, in spite of my endeavour to bestow upon *her* a lordly scowl. "Something's upset you; your liver's wrong—that *I* can see in the twinkling of an eye. I haven't studied medicine for nothing! You should have taken a cooling draught and gone to bye-bye" (gone to *bye-bye*! Silly minx! did she take me for a baby!) "hours ago. Why did you sit up for me?"

I fixed my reproachful gaze upon her, solemnly, penetratingly, and—*quailed*! She looked so handsome, especially now that she had thrown away the end of that horrible cigar. She had such a commanding presence,—that clinging grey velvet gown became her so admirably, and round her full white throat she wore the

diamond pendant I had given her on our wedding-day—a pendant containing a miniature portrait of myself. *My* portrait! She wore it—she, this stately, beautiful young woman wore my miserable physiognomy on her bosom! My wrath melted into sudden maudlin sentiment.

“Honoriam,” I said feebly, slipping my arm round her waist—“oh, Honoriam! if you only *loved* me!”

She bent her head towards mine, lower and lower till her lips almost touched my ear.

“Look here, old boy,” she then whispered confidentially, “you may as well make a clean breast of it! Have you—*have you been at that brandy I left out on the sideboard?*”

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## CHAPTER IV.

It will now, I think, be readily understood that Honoria was a difficult woman to argue with. There was no imaginativeness about her, no romance, no sentiment. If a man gave way to his feelings (as I did on the occasion just related), she set his natural emotion down either to indigestion or insobriety. The "tide of passion"—the "overflowing of the human heart," and all that sort of thing—belonged, she considered, to the "stuff and rubbish" books written by Scott, Thackeray and Dickens, or, worse still, suggested poetry. And if there was anything in the world Honoria positively hated, it was poetry. She didn't mind the "Ingoldsby Legends" or the "Biglow Papers," but poetry, real poetry, was her favourite abomination. She always went to sleep over a play of Shakespeare's. The only time I ever saw her laugh at any performance of the kind was during Irving's representation of "Macbeth." *Then* she was in silent convulsions of mirth. Whenever the celebrated Henry gasped a gasp, or wriggled a wriggle, she seemed to be seized with spasms. But the play itself didn't move her one iota; she dozed off comfortably in the carriage going home, and waking up

suddenly just as we reached our own door, she demanded:

"I say, Willie, what became of the old man who went to stop with Irving in his cardboard castle? Never saw *him* again! Wasn't it funny? Must have left out a bit of the play by mistake!"

I realized then that she had never comprehended the leading *motif* of the sublime tragedy—namely, the murder of King Duncan—and with anxious care and laboured precision I explained it to her as best I could. She listened amiably enough, and when I had finished, yawned capaciously.

"Good gracious! So *that* was what it was all about! Well, it didn't seem clear to *me*! I thought Irving had stuck the *blue* man—the old blue thing with a patch over his eye that came up through a trap door at dinner-time." (She meant Banquo's ghost!) "*He* was funny—awfully funny! He was just the colour of a damp lucifer match—you know, one of those things that *won't* strike, but only fizzle and smell! Anyhow it was a muddle, couldn't tell who was killed and who wasn't. Lovely last sprawl that of Irving—looked as if he were coming out of his skin! *He* was done for—he was killed in the play, wasn't he?"

"He was," I assented gravely.

"*That's* all right! Hope he ate a good supper afterwards! Must make a man peckish to work about a big

sword like that—all for nothing too! Poking at the air—just fancy! Dreadfully exhausting!”

And off she went to bed with no more notion of the grandeur and terror and pathos of Shakespeare's most awe-inspiring production than if she had been a woman of wood! So I *knew* she had no sentiment in her, and of course I was a fool to expect any sympathy from her in my hours of irritation or despondency. And those hours were getting pretty frequent, but for various reasons I held\* my peace and made no further complaints. I would wait, I resolved, and patiently watch the course of events.

Events progressed onward as they are prone to do, and my wife continued her independently masculine mode of living without any fresh remonstrances from me just then. The time I had anticipated came at last, and a boy was born to us; a remarkably fine child—(yes, I know! the most weazened infant, if it be the first-born, is always “remarkably fine” in the opinion of its parents; but this one was *not* a humbug—he was really and truly a good specimen), and with his birth I became happy and hopeful. Surely *now*, I thought, with a swelling heart—*now* my Honoria will realize her true position, and will grow ashamed of those “mannish” habits, which rob a woman of the refined grace and sweetness that should attach to the dignity of motherhood. My spirits rose. I pictured my wife as a different

and more lovable creature, retaining all her bright humour and frank vivacity, but gradually becoming more softened in character, and more chastened in disposition; I saw her, in my mind's eye, carrying her child in her arms, and murmuring all that pretty baby nonsense which men pretend they despise, but which in their hearts they secretly love to hear, and I built up a veritable *château en Espagne* of home-happiness as I had never yet known it, but which I now sincerely believed I was destined to enjoy.

Need I say that my hopes were doomed to disappointment, and that I cursed myself for being such a sentimental ass as to imagine they could ever be realized? Honoria was up and about again in no time, and seemed almost, if not quite, cheerfully unconscious of our boy's existence. He, poor mite, was consigned to the care of two nurses—large, beer-consuming women both, and ungrammatical of speech—and when his screams announced that all was not going well with his infant career—that pins were being put in the wrong places, or that windy spasms were the result of over-feeding, Honoria would smile at me and remark blandly:

“*There's* a savage little brute! Doesn't he *roar*! Never mind! Perhaps he'll scare away the organ-grinders!”

On one of these occasions, when my son's com-

plaints were so heartrending that they threatened to lift the very roof off the house by sheer volume of sound, I said:

"Don't you think you'd better go and see what's the matter, Honoria? It's not quite fair to leave him entirely at the mercy of the nurses!"

"Why not?" she responded composedly. "*They* understand him—I don't. He's a perfect mystery to *me*. He screams if I touch him, and rolls right over on his back and makes the most horrible faces at me when I look at him. Nurse says I hold him wrong—it seems to me impossible to hold him *right*. He's as soft as putty, and bruises everywhere. Can't lay a finger on him without bruising him black and blue. *You* try it! I wanted to amuse him yesterday—blew the cab whistle for him as loud as I could, and I thought he would have burst with howling. We don't take to each other a bit—isn't it funny? He doesn't want me, and I don't want him—we're better apart, really!"

"Honoria," I said (we were at breakfast, and I rose from the table with an angry movement), "you are heartless! You speak cruelly and slightly of the poor child. You don't deserve to be a mother!"

She laughed good-humouredly.

"You're right, Willie; that's one for you! I don't deserve to be, and I didn't want to be. Oh, what a

bear you look! Be off to the City, for goodness' sake; don't stop scowling there! Would *you* like to take baby out for once? I'll fetch him for you—he'll be *such* a nice quiet companion for you down town!"

I beat a hasty retreat; I had no words wherewith to answer her, but I released my pent-up wrath by banging the street door as I went out with a violence that I freely admit was femininely pettish and unworthy of man. And I went down to my office in a very angry mood, and my anger was not lessened when, turning sharp round a corner, I ran up against the "boy" with the moustaches.

"So glad to meet you," he said with his gentlemanly drawl and elegant air. "Hope you're coming to the moors this year with Mrs. Tribkin?"

I stared at him—he looked provokingly cool and comfortable in his white flannels (always white flannels! However, it was a fact that August had just begun)—and then I replied with some frigidity:

"I am not aware that Mrs. Tribkin is going to the moors at all. I believe—indeed I am sure—our—*er—my* intention is to spend a quiet holiday at the seaside for the benefit of the child's health."

"Oh," murmured the "boy" languidly. "Then I suppose I have made a mistake. Some one told me she had taken a share in the grouse-shootings this

season—gone halves with Mrs. Stirling, of Glen Ruach, dontcherknow. Quite a big party expected down there on the Twelfth.”

“Really,” I snarled, for I was getting angrier every minute. “Are *you* going?”

He looked fatuously surprised.

“*Me?* Oh, dear no! I’m on the river.”

“You’re always on the river now, I suppose, aren’t you?” I inquired, with a sarcastic grin.

“Always,” he replied placidly. “Won’t you and Mrs. Tribkin come and see me in my little house-boat? Awfully snug, dontcherknow—moored in capital position. Delighted to see you any time!”

“Thanks, thanks!” and here I strove to snigger at him politely in the usual “society” way. “But we are very much tied at home just now—my son is rather too young to appreciate the pleasures of river-life!”

“Oh, of course!” And for once the “boy” appeared really startled. “It would never do for a—for a little kid, you know. How is he?” This with an air of hypocritical anxiety.

“He is very well and flourishing,” I answered proudly. “As fine a child as——”

“Yes—er—no doubt,” interrupted Moustaches hurriedly. “And Honoria—Mrs. Tribkin—is awfully devoted, I suppose?”

“Awfully!” I said, fixing my eyes full and sternly

upon his inanely handsome countenance. "She is *absorbed* in him—absorbed, heart and soul!"

"Curious—I mean delightful!" stammered the hateful young humbug. "Well—er—give my kind regards, please, and just mention that I'm on the river!"

As well mention that Queen Anne was dead, I thought scornfully, as I watched him dash over a crossing under the very nose of a plunging cab-horse and disappear on the opposite side. He was a fish, I declared to myself—a fish, not a man! Scrape his gills and cook him for dinner, I muttered deliriously as I went along—scrape his gills and cook him for dinner! This idiotic phrase became fixed in my mind, and repeated itself over and over again in my ears with the most tiresome monotony, whereby it will be easily comprehended that my nerves were very much unstrung and my system upset generally by the feverish mental worry and domestic vexation I was undergoing.

On reaching home that afternoon I found Honoria in high glee. She was lounging in one of those long, comfortable "deck" chairs, which, when properly cushioned, are the most luxurious seats in the world, smoking a cigarette and reading *Truth*.

"I say!" she exclaimed, turning round as I entered. "Here's a lark! Georgie's going to marry the Earl of Richmoor!"

I confess I was rather surprised,

"What, *Georgie*?" I echoed incredulously.

"Yes, *Georgie*!" repeated my wife with emphasis. "Little sly, coaxy-woaxy *Georgie*, who can't say bo! to a goose. Going to be a real live countess—think of it! Good gracious, what a fool Richmoor is—he might have had *me*!"

"Might he, indeed, Honoria?" I inquired coldly, drawing off my gloves, and thinking for the thousandth time what a thorough *man* she looked. "Did he know that such a chance of supreme happiness was to be had for the asking?"

"Of course he didn't." Here she tossed away *Truth*, and catching up a horrible fat pug she adored, she kissed its nasty wet nose with effusion. "And he never tried to find out. He's an awful swell, you know—the kind of fellow that coolly 'cuts' the fresh-dollars American, and won't have anything to do with trade. Writes books and sculpts."

"Is that a new word, *sculpts*?" I asked satirically.

"Don't know, I'm sure. It means that he carves out busts and things in marble—not for money, you know, just for his own amusement. Oh, he's a queer card! But fancy his proposing to *Georgie*, of all people in the world—such a little scrub of a woman!"

I reflected on this description. My wife's youngest sister was little, certainly, but she could scarcely, in justice, be called a "scrub." She had beautiful eyes—

not so beautiful in colour as in their dreamy expression of tenderness; she had a sweet, soft, kissable face, a charming fairy-like figure, and a very gentle, yet fascinating, manner. There was nothing decidedly "striking" about her, and yet she was about to make a more brilliant match than could have been possibly hoped for an entirely portionless girl in her position. Honoria went on meditatively:

"Yes, he might have had *me*, and just think of the difference! Look at me, and look at Georgie! One would scarcely take us for sisters."

"Scarcely, indeed!" I assented, with a muffled sigh. "Your ways are rather opposed to hers, Honoria. For instance, *she* does not smoke!"

"No, poor little thing!" and Honoria threw away the end of her cigarette and immediately lit another. "She thinks it horrid."

"So do I," I said with marked emphasis—"Honoria, so do *I* think it horrid!"

She glanced at me, smiling.

"I know you do," she cheerfully admitted; "you've said so often enough." She smoked a little in silence, and then resumed, "Now look here, Willie, listen to me! I've been thinking over things lately, and I've come to the conclusion that we must talk it out! That's the term—talk it out."

"Talk *what* out, Honoria?" I stammered nervously.

"The marriage question," she replied. "There's no doubt whatever that it has been, and that it *is*, a ghastly mistake!"

"*Our* marriage a mistake, dear?" I began anxiously. "Surely you——"

But she checked me with a slight gesture of her hand.

"I don't wish to say that I think ours a greater mistake than anybody else's," she went on. "Not a bit of it. I think *all* marriages are mistakes—the institution itself is a mistake."

I gazed at her blankly. My mind recoiled upon itself and wandered drearily back through long vistas of back numbers of the *Daily Telegraph* (that glorious and ever-to-be-praised journal is everybody's discussion-ground), and there beheld, set forth in large capitals, "Is Marriage a Failure?" attended by masses of correspondence from strong-minded ladies and woeful-spirited men. Was Honoria of the former class, as I most assuredly was of the latter?

"The institution of marriage is itself a mistake," repeated Honoria firmly. "It ties a man to a woman, and a woman to a man, for the rest of their mortal lives, regardless of future consequences. And it doesn't work. The poor wretches get tired of always trotting along cheek by jowl in the same old road, and there's no way of breaking loose unless one or the other elects

to become a scamp. There's not change enough. Now, take us two, for example. *You* want a change, and *I* want a change—that's plain!"

The time had come for me to speak my mind out manfully, and I did so.

"I *do* want a change, Honoria," I said gently, and with all the earnestness I felt, "but not the sort of change you hint at. I want a change, not *away* from you, my dear, but *in* you. I want to see the *womanly* side of your nature—the gentleness, softness and sweetness that are all in your heart, I am sure, if you would only let these lovely qualities have their way, instead of covering them up under the cloak of an assumed masculine behaviour, which, as I have often said to you before, is highly unbecoming to you, and distresses me greatly. I suffer, Honoria, I really suffer, when I see and hear *you*, my wife, aping the manners, customs, and slang-parlance of men. It is surely no disgrace to a woman to be womanly; her weakness is stronger than all strength; her mildness checks anger and engenders peace. In her right position, she is the saving-grace of men; her virtues make them ashamed of their vices, her simplicity disarms their cunning, her faith and truth inspire them with the highest, noblest good. Honoria, dear Honoria! I know there are many women nowadays who act as you do, and think no shame or harm of it—who hunt and fish and shoot and smoke and

play billiards, and who are the declared comrades of men in all their rough sports and pastimes—but, believe me, no good can come of this throwing down of the barriers between the sexes; no advantage can possibly accrue to a great nation like ours from allowing the women to deliberately sacrifice their delicacy and reserve, and the men to resign their ancient code of chivalry and reverence! No, Honoria, it is not in keeping with the law of nature, and whatever is opposed to the law of nature must in time be proved wrong. It will be a bad, a woeful day for England when women as a class assert themselves altogether as the equals of men—for men, even at their best, have vile animal passions, low desires, and vulgar vices that most of them would be bitterly sorry to see reflected in the women whom they instinctively wish to respect. Believe me, dear, I speak from my heart! Give me a little of that self-abnegation which so gloriously distinguishes your sex in times of sickness and trouble! Be a true woman, Honoria; leave off smoking and betting, and let me find in you the sweet wife I need to encourage and cheer me on my way through the world! You are precious to me, Honoria; I want to see you at your best—I want——”

Here my voice failed me. I was sincerely moved; a foolish lump rose in my throat, and I could not go on. Honoria, too, was serious. She had listened with

admirable patience, and now, taking her cigarette from her lips, she flicked the ash off and looked at it reflectively.

"It's a bad job," she said at last with a short sigh—"a regular bad job! I'm—I'm *awfully* sorry for you, old boy!"

And she held out her hand to me with a sort of manly candour that was simply indescribable. I clasped that hand, I kissed it, whereupon she hastily withdrew it.

"Don't do that," she laughed. "It gives me the creeps! Fact, really! can't bear it! Now listen, Willie! The case is as clear as daylight. You've married the wrong sister!"

"Married the wrong sister?" I echoed bewilderedly.

"Of course you have, you dear old dunderhead! You should have taken Georgie while you had the chance of a choice. She would have sat on your knee, cuddled in your arms, curled your hair with her fingers, and kissed you on the tip of your nose! That's Georgie all over! Turtle-dove and 'Mary's lamb' in one. That's what you wanted, and that's what you haven't got, poor dear! I'm not a dove, and I'm certainly not a lamb. I'm—I'm a fair specimen"—she smiled candidly—"a fair specimen of the woman of the future, and you, old boy, *you* want a woman of the past. Now haven't I hit it off exactly?"

I leaned back in my chair with a half groan, and she continued:

"You see, Willie, you want me to change my nature and become a big transformation scene like they have in those pantomimes, when the old witch of the piece turns into a fairy perched on the edge of a rainbow. Those things are all very well on the stage, but they can't be done in real life. You know I was at school at Brighton?"

I assented, wondering what was coming next.

"Well, there, among other accomplishments, we learnt how to ride, and our riding-master (a dashing sort of fellow, full of fun) taught us how to smoke, lessons *gratis*. Fact! We all learnt it—on the sly, of course, just as he flirted with us all on the sly; but we became proficient in both arts. We were fifty girls at that place, and we all smoked whenever we had the chance, and got to like it. We ate loads of scented bonbons afterwards to kill the smell, and we were never found out. Brighton schools are not celebrated for strictness, you know; the young women do pretty much as they like in every way, and get into no end of scrapes often. But that's wide of the mark. The point is, that I learnt to smoke at school, and when I came home I met lots of women who smoked also, and naturally I went on with it till the habit became second nature. Why, you

might as well ask a washerwoman to give up her tea as ask me to give up my cigar!"

"Is it so bad as that?" I stammered weakly.

"Yes, it *is* 'so bad as that'—or so good!" she laughed amiably. "You used not to have such violent prejudices, Willie! You've smoked enough yourself, I'm sure!"

"But, Honoria, *I* am different——" I began.

"Pardon me," she interposed smilingly; "that is just what I cannot see! I do not understand why there should be any difference between the customs of men and the customs of women."

"Good God!" I exclaimed, sitting bolt upright and speaking with some excitement. "Do you mean to say that women are capable of doing *everything* that men do? Can you contemplate a battle being fought by women? Could they undertake a naval engagement? Are women fit to lay down railways, build bridges and construct canals? Will they break stones on the road and drive hansom-cabs and omnibuses? Will they become stokers and porters? Will they dig wells and put up telegraph wires? I tell you, Honoria, this craze, this mania for striving to make women the equals of men, is as wicked as it is unnatural, and can engender nothing but misery to the nation as well as to the individual!"

"In what rank, then, would you propose to place

woman," demanded Honoria calmly, "if she is *not* (as *I* hold she *is*) the equal of man? Is she his inferior or superior?"

"She is his inferior in physical strength," I answered warmly; "his inferior in brute force and plodding power of endurance; his inferior too in consecutive far-planning and carrying out of plans; her brain is too quick, too subtle, too fine, to hold much of the useful quality of that dogged and determined patience which distinguishes so many of our greatest inventors and explorers. But, Honoria, she is (if she is true to herself) infinitely his superior in delicate tact, sweet sympathy, grand unselfishness and divinely-awful purity. I say divinely-awful, because if she be indeed 'chaste as ice and pure as snow,' though she may not escape the calumny of the wicked, she commands and retains the passionate reverence of men who know the worst side of the world well enough to appreciate such angelic and queenly qualities. Compared with man, woman is therefore his inferior and superior both in one—a complex and beautiful problem, a delicious riddle which the best men never wish to have completely guessed; they prefer to leave something behind the veil—something mysterious and forever sanctified, and shut out from the vulgar gaze of the curious crowd!"

Thus far I had proceeded in eloquence when Honoria interrupted me.

"That sounds all very nice and pretty," she said, "but to speak bluntly, it won't wash! Don't talk of your sex, my dear boy, as though they were all romantic knights-errant of the olden time, because they're not! They're nasty fellows, most of them, and if women are nasty too, why, then they help to make them so! Look at them! Talk of smoke, why they're always smoking—dirty pipes, too, full of beastly tobacco—cheap tobacco; and as for their admiration of all those womanly qualities you describe, they don't care a bit for them! They'll run after a ballet-dancer much more readily than they'll say a civil word to a lady, and they'll crowd round a woman whose name has been bandied about in a horrid divorce case, and neglect the good girl who has never made herself notorious."

"Not always," I interposed quickly. "You've got an example in your own sister, and *she* is to marry the Earl of Richmoor."

"True enough," and my wife rose from her chair, shook her skirts, and flung away the last fragment of her cigarette. "But he's an exception—a very rare exception—to the rule. And all the same, Willie, *I* can't change myself any more than the leopard can change his spots, as the Bible says. I'm a result of the age we live in, and you don't quite like me!"

"I *do* like you, Honoria——" I began earnestly.

"No, you don't—not quite!" she insisted, her eyes

twinkling satirically. "And I promise you I'll think over the position very carefully and see what I can do. Meanwhile, you needn't have the *boys* any more if they're disagreeable to you."

"They're not disagreeable," I faltered; "but——"

"Yes, I understand—want the house to yourself. All right! I'll give them the straight tip. I can see them elsewhere, you know; they're not bound to come here often."

"Elsewhere?" I questioned in some bewilderment. "Where, Honoria, if not here?"

"Oh, all sorts of places," she answered laughingly. "On the river, at the Grosvenor, Hurlingham—heaps of old haunts we used to go to."

"But suppose I object, Honoria," I said with warmth. "Suppose I do not approve of your meeting the 'boys' at these different haunts, what then?"

"Oh, you won't be such an old goose," she replied cheerfully. "You know there's no harm, no real mean *lowness* about *me*, don't you?"

Her clear eyes met mine straightly and truthfully as star-beams.

"Yes, I know, Honoria," I said gently but seriously; "I am perfectly aware of your goodness and honour, my dear—but there *is* such a thing as gossip; and that you should go about at all with these young men seems to

me like a rash laying of yourself open to society back-biting and scandal."

"Not a bit of it," she averred. "Lots of women do it—in fact, *I've* not yet come across a married woman who wants to set up for a prude in *these* days! And I couldn't drop the boys altogether, you know—poor chaps, they'd feel it awfully! Now don't be so down in the mouth, Willie. Cheer up! As I told you, I'm going to think over the position and see what I can do for you."

Just at that moment a wild screech from the nursery announced more sufferings on the part of Master Hatwell-Tribkin.

"Doesn't he just *yell!*" remarked Honoria serenely. "Lungs of seasoned leather he must have! Ta-ta!"

And with a light wave of her hand she left me to my own reflections, which were very far indeed from being consolatory. What a strange difficulty I was in! There was not a tinge of wickedness, not the least savour of deceit, about Honoria. She was as honest and true as steel, and yet—yet I was never more dimly conscious of anything in my life than that the time was approaching when I might find it no longer possible to endure her company!

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## CHAPTER V.

THE next day, having business in that particular neighbourhood, I lunched at the Criterion. I had scarcely sat down to my modest chop and potatoes when two gentlemen entered and took the table just behind me, and glancing round in a casual sort of way I recognized in one of them the Earl of Richmoor. He was a good-looking fellow, with rather a thoughtful yet kindly face, and a very "winning" smile. I had only met him on one occasion at a large "at home" given by Honoria's mother, and it was not likely he would have any very distinct recollection of me; so I kept my back carefully turned, not wishing to obtrude myself upon his notice. Presently, however, something he was saying to his friend attracted my attention. With my knife and fork suspended in air I listened anxiously.

"It's a thousand pities," he remarked. "She's a handsome creature, wonderfully clever and spirited. I was half inclined to fall in love with her myself at one time, but, by Jove! I wanted a *woman*, you know, not a semi-man in petticoats!"

"She won't wear petticoats long, I should say," returned the other man with a laugh. "If report knows

anything about her, she'll be in trousers before she's many years older."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Richmoor, and I heard him pouring out wine into his glass. "If she does I shall have to cut her, though she *is* Georgie's sister!"

Down clattered my knife and fork, and I drank a large gulp of water to cool my feverish agitation. It was *my wife* they were talking of! and my ears tingled with shame and anger. *My wife! My Honoria!*

"She's a *good* woman, you know," added Richmoor presently. "Never plays a double game—couldn't be false if she tried. In fact her only fault is that horrible masculinity of hers; she thinks it's 'the thing,' unfortunately; she fancies men admire it. Poor soul! if she only knew! Of course there *are* some young asses who like to see women smoking and who encourage them to do it, and a few despicable snobs who urge them to shoot and go deer-stalking; but these sort of gaby fellows are in the minority after all. It's a most pitiable thing to see otherwise nice women wilfully going out of their natural sphere."

"It is—exceedingly so," agreed his friend energetically. "I can't think why they do it; they only get laughed at in the long run. That woman Stirling, of Glen Ruach, helped to spoil Honoria Maggs; she's a regular cad. Have you ever met her?"

"No."

"Oh, *she* dresses as nearly like a man as is compatible with the present *convenances*; cuts her hair quite short, wears shirt-fronts and men's ties, shoots, bags her game, goes after salmon (she landed two the other day weighing twelve pounds each), rides a tricycle, has a perfect mania for fox-hunting (always in at the death), and *smokes*—ye gods, how she *does* smoke! She's got a regular Turkish pipe in her boudoir, and is always at it."

"Disgusting!" said Richmoor. "Where's her husband?"

"Where?" and the other laughed. "Not with *her*, you may depend upon it! Couldn't stand *her* for long! He's in India, beating up tigers in the jungle, I believe; most probably he thinks it better to be torn to pieces by tigers than live with such a wife."

"Talking of husbands, I wonder how poor Hatwell-Tribkin gets on," said Richmoor meditatively. "He must have an awful time of it, I expect!"

I could stand this no longer. Rising abruptly from my seat I seized my hat and umbrella and grasped them convulsively in one hand; then, approaching the next table, I forced a politely awful smile and laid my visiting card solemnly down beside Richmoor's plate without a word!

He started violently and his face flushed deeply, the colour spreading to the very roots of his hair.

"Tribkin!" he exclaimed. "My dear fellow, I—I—I really—— Upon my word, I—I——" He broke off confused, and exchanged uneasy glances with his friend. I watched his discomfort keenly, in that special way that the snake, according to novelists, watches the fascinated sparrow.

"I overheard your remarks, my lord," I said in a sort of stage whisper, accentuated by much stuttering severity. "I overheard—unintentionally and with pain—your remarks concerning my—my wife! I need scarcely say that they were not agreeable to me. I consider—I most emphatically consider, sir, that you owe me an apology!"

"My dear Tribkin," and the young man eagerly extended his hand, "pray let me make it at once! I apologise most sincerely, most penitently. I am awfully sorry, really! My friend here, Mr. Herbert Vaughan, is as sorry as I am, I'm sure, aren't you, Vaughan?" The gentleman appealed to, who had been diligently sorting crumbs on the table-cloth, looked up with a burning blush, bowed low, and acquiesced. "It's very foolish to get talking about—about people, you know; one can never be certain that they are not close at hand. I *hope* you forgive me! I really didn't mean——"

Here I cut him short; he was evidently so sincerely grieved and vexed that my anger cooled down completely, and I pressed his proffered hand.

"That's enough," I said dismally, but gently too. "I know people *will* talk, and I suppose Mrs. Tribkin"—here I brightened up a bit—"is handsome enough and clever enough to *be* talked about!"

"Exactly," and the young earl looked immensely relieved at this way of putting it. "That's what Georgie always says. You know I'm going to marry Georgie?"

"I know," I replied, "and I congratulate you!"

"Thanks! Now do have a glass of wine, won't you? Here, waiter, bring another bottle of Beaune."

I was half disposed to decline this invitation, but he pressed me so cordially that I could not very well refuse. I therefore sat down, and we all, including the young gentleman named Vaughan, conversed for some time on the subject of Woman generally—woman judged from two points of view, namely, the high and dignified position which Nature evidently intended her to occupy, and the exceedingly cheap and low level at which she, in these modern days, seems inclined to place herself. It may and it will no doubt surprise many fair readers of these unpretending pages to learn that, taken the majority of opinion held by the best and bravest men of England (and by the best and bravest I mean those who have their country's good at heart, who revere their Queen, and who have not yet trampled chivalry in the dust and made a jest of honour), it will be found that they are unanimous in wishing to keep sweet woman in

her proper sphere; a sphere, I may add, which is by no means narrow, but, on the contrary, wide enough to admit all things gracious, becoming and beautiful; inspiring things both in art and loftiest literature; things that tend to refine, but not to degrade and vulgarize. Men have no sort of objection to make when women, gifted with a rare and subtle power of intellect, take to the study of high philosophy and glorious science; if, like Mary Somerville, they can turn their bright eyes undismayed on the giddy wonders of the firmament and expound in musical phrase the glittering riddles of astronomy, we hear them with as much reverence and honour as though they were wise angels speaking. If, like Elizabeth Barrett, they pour from a full sweet heart such poetry as is found in the "Sonnets from the Portuguese," we listen entranced and moved to the lovely music that "Gentlier on the spirit lies, Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes." Who does not admire and revere the woman who wrote the following exquisite lines which, with all their passion, are still true womanly:

"How do I love thee? Let me count the ways:  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of Being and Ideal Grace;  
I love thee to the level of every day's  
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight;  
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right,  
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise;

I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith:  
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints,—I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears of all my life!—and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death!”

In fine, we—I speak for the men—we do not want to shut out woman from what she can becomingly do without destroying the indefinable soft attraction of her womanhood. But when she wishes to vulgarize herself; when instead of a queen she elects to be a street scavenger or the driver of a dust cart, we object. We object for her sake quite as much as for our own; because we know what the direful result of such a state of topsy-turveydom must infallibly be. When women voluntarily resign their position as the silent monitors and models of grace and purity, down will go all the pillars of society, and we shall scarcely differ in our manners and customs from the nations we call “barbaric,” because as yet they have not adopted Christ's exalted idea of the value and sanctity of female influence on the higher development of the human race.

But I am getting serious—too serious to be borne with by the impatient readers of to-day. All the same, we *must* be serious sometimes; we cannot always be grinning about like apes among cocoa-nut trees. There's too much grinning nowadays—false grinning, I mean. We grin at our friends, grin straight through the length

*The Hired Baby, etc.*

and breadth of an "at home," grin-in church and out of church, grin at scandals, grin at suicides, grin at everything, everywhere. We might as well be death's heads at once and have done with it. We shall be some day; but I fancy we are rather anticipating the pleasure!

When I got home that evening I did not fail to report to my wife the faithful account of my meeting with the Earl of Richmoor and his friend Mr. Vaughan, and what *they* had said, and what *I* had said about *her* and about her sex generally. She heard me with that admirable equanimity which always distinguished her, but it made no effect upon her.

"Richmoor's a prig," she said curtly. "He always was, you know. One of those dreadfully stuck-up, blue-blood, long-lineage fellows. Bobbie is nothing to him." ("Bobbie" was the "boy" with the moustaches; scrape his gills and cook him for dinner, I mused dreamily.) "And so you said I was handsome and clever enough to be talked about, did you?"

"I did."

"Well now, old boy, that was awfully nice of you," and she gave me a bright smile. "Husbands are not always so complimentary behind their wives' backs. You deserve a reward, and I'm going to give it to you! You shall get rid of me for a whole six weeks; there!"

"Get rid of you, Honoria?" I faltered amazed. "What do you——"

"Look here," she went on rapidly, "I've arranged it all. Mother will take baby—she's quite agreeable—and you can shut up the house and go where you like and do what you like, and have a real jolly good time. *I* shan't ask what you've been up to! This is the fourth of August; well, say we meet again here about the twentieth of September, or later if you like; that'll give us a good long swing apart."

"But, Honoria," I exclaimed in utter bewilderment, "what do you mean? Where are you going? What do you propose to do?"

"Shoot," she replied promptly. "I'm booked to Trotty Stirling for the Twelfth, and mean to bag more game than any of the male duffers she's asked down to Glen Ruach this season. She's invited *you!*—Poor dear! it would never suit you to see me blazing away over the heather and tramping across the moors in leggings; but it's awful fun though!"

"No, you are right! It would *not* suit me!" I vociferated, giving way to the wrath I could no longer restrain. "It would not, and it *will* not suit me! Honoria, I am master in my own house; you are my wife, and I expect you to obey me. I have never exacted my right of obedience from you till now, Honoria; but now, now I *do* exact it! You will not go

to this horrible woman at Glen Ruach (wretch! she ought to be ashamed of herself), you will *not*, Honoria! You will remain with me and the child, as it is your duty to do. I will not permit you to indulge in these unladylike sports any longer; you will become the laughing-stock of the town and make me a laughing-stock too! And no wonder; *no* man with any spirit would allow you to make such a fool of yourself—yes, a *fool*, Honoria, whether you like the expression or not; you *must* look a fool with a gun in your hand, ‘blazing away,’ as you call it; in leggings too—good God!”

And I laughed bitterly, and flung myself into a chair, trembling with excitement. She surveyed me quite coolly, showing no sign of temper.

“Thanks!” she said. “Thanks awfully! You *are* polite, upon my word! *You* don’t want a six-penny handbook on etiquette, evidently! But you’re old-fashioned, Willie—frightfully old-fashioned! Behind the time altogether—miles and miles behind! You don’t suppose I’m going to disappoint all my ‘set’ down at Glen Ruach just to gratify your middle-ages prejudices, do you? Not a bit of it! I advise you to run across Channel for a while—take the waters at Homburg or something—you’ll feel twenty per cent. better afterwards. I’ve arranged to leave here on the tenth, so you can make your plans accordingly.”

She was imperturbable, and I flared round upon her once more.

"Honor, I shall speak to your mother!"

"What for?" she calmly inquired.

"I shall tell her of your unwomanly—your unwifely—your *impossible* conduct!"

"Good gracious! That *will* be funny! Poor old Mammy! She knows all about me, and so did *you* know all about me before you married me—what in the world are you grumbling at?"

"I did not know," I gasped, wrenching my handkerchief round and round in my hand as a sort of physical relief to my feelings. "I did not know you went to—to such lengths, Honor!"

"As the leggings?" she demanded. "Well, they *are* long, there's no doubt about that!"

And with a ringing burst of laughter she left me—left me to consume myself in as silent and impotent a fury as ever racked the long-enduring spirit of married man!

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## CHAPTER VI.

I KEPT my word. I *did* speak to Honoria's mother, and a very dreary conversation we had of it. Mrs. Maggs was a thin, sheep-faced, flabby old lady, who impressed people at first sight as being "*so sweet!*" on account of the feebly-smiling chronic amiability of her expression; but those who came to know her well, as I did, grew rapidly sick of her smile, and passionately yearned to shake her into some semblance of actual vivacity. She was the most helpless, tame old woman I ever met, with watery blue eyes, and tremulous hands that were for ever busy smoothing down the folds of her black silk dress, or settling the lace she always wore about her shoulders, or playing with the loosely-flying strings of her cap. Those hands used to worry me—they were never still. When she made tea (which she did frequently and always badly) they hovered above the tray like bleached birds' claws, shaking over the sugar and wobbling about with the cream-jug, till any enjoyment of the "cup that cheers" became impossible to me. I spoke to her, however, because I had threatened Honoria I *would* do so (and it is very foolish to threaten and not perform—even children find *that* out and despise you

for it). I called on her for the express purpose of speaking to her, as I explained in a note marked "*Confidential*," which I sent round to her house (three squares off from us) by my man servant. Time was going on, and Honoria was going on too, or rather she was going off. Her portmanteau was packed and labelled for Scotland; her gun-case and sporting equipments stood prepared in the hall; she herself had been absent from home for three or four days, staying with a Mrs. Netcalf on the river—a place quite close to the spot where "Bobbie" with the moustaches had got his "little house-boat" moored. She had written to me briefly explaining that they were all having a "high old time," and asking me (for mere form's sake, of course) whether I would not leave my "prejudices" behind and join them? To this letter, which I thought impertinent, considering the seething state of our domestic affairs, I vouchsafed no reply; my mind was too full of my own increasing grievances. The baby—my helpless son—had already been packed off to his grandmother's, nurses and all. He was sent away during one of my daily absences in the city, and a nice row we had about him, poor innocent, when his screams no longer cheered the silence of our dwelling. I learned then that Honoria, after all, *had* a temper; not precisely the sort of temper we generally credit woman with, which may be described as a swift summer hurricane—eyes flashing lightning and pouring

tears at once, followed by brilliant sunshine. No! Honoria's temper merely developed itself into a remarkable facility for saying very nasty and sarcastic things—things that riled a fellow horribly and rubbed him up entirely the wrong way. Witty, cold-blooded, "smart" remarks she threw at me; epigrammatic sentences that were about as clever as they could well be—and I *knew* they were clever, and was all the more hurt by them. Because, as far as her intelligence went, she was (I must really repeat it) a *wonderful* woman—simply wonderful! She leaped across country, metaphorically speaking, and seized a galloping idea by the mane, as though it were a horse, while others were peeping doubtfully at it under cover and round the corner—that was *her* way of mastering information. Men can't do that sort of thing; they have to coax knowledge into their slow brains by degrees; clever women absorb it like sponges, without any apparent trouble. So that we had once or twice what I should freely describe as a devil of a row. *I* got red in the face, and *she* never changed colour—*I* swore, and *she* dropped me a mocking curtsey—*I* held on to a chair to save myself from getting lifted bodily off the ground by the honest warmth of my indignation, and *she* lounged on a sofa, smoked, and grinned at me. Yes! *I* say *grinned*! I would no longer call that white glistening tooth-display of hers a *smile*; it had a cold and snarly look that I could not conscientiously admire. And

yet I was fond of her too, and I knew she was a good woman—none better, so far as honesty and straight principles were concerned. And thus it was that, torn by conflicting emotions, fagged and worn out by the constant fret of my own domestic wretchedness, I determined to appeal to Mrs. Maggs, though I instinctively felt, before I made the attempt, that it was an act of mere desperation, and that it would result in no sort of advantage or help to me in the unfortunate position I occupied.

The old lady was in a more than usually nervous state when I arrived, and came fluttering to meet me at the drawing-room door with that anxious propitiatory smile I abhorred, more pronounced than ever.

“My *dear* William!” she murmured, her hands waving about me like the hands of a very stagey mesmerist. “It is so nice of you to come and see me, so *very* nice and kind of you!” Here she caught her breath and sighed. She was fond of doing that—her pet idea was that she had heart-disease. “Dear baby is doing *so* well, and is quite happy upstairs! Georgie goes and sits on the floor and lets him play with her back hair, and he *does* tear it so”—her pale eyes watered visibly at this—“I tell her she’ll have none left on her scalp to be married with. Dear girl! You’ve heard about Richmoor? Yes, such a *brilliant* match, and he’s such a *nice* man; not very communicative, but very gentle-

manly. And *he* plays with baby too; isn't it pretty of him? He goes upstairs with Georgie constantly, and I hear them laughing together, dear things! It is *so* nice of him, you know, being a man, to like stopping up in the nursery, which must be dull—no newspapers or anything—and he can't smoke, or he *won't*, on account of Georgie's being there; he's very particular about that sort of thing; besides smoke would be bad for baby's eyes." Here she stopped for breath again, pressing her hand on her side, while I gazed at her and forced a politely-soothing smile. (I was obliged to smile, because she thought everybody who didn't smile at her was cross or ill, and I did not wish to pose as either one or the other.) "Yes, baby is quite a boon," she went on in plaintively cheerful tones. "A positive boon! keeps everybody employed, and is such a *darling*! I'm so glad you'll let us take care of him while Honoria is away."

"It is just about Honoria that I came to speak to you," I said, clearing my throat and edging past those ghostly fingers of hers that seemed to give me Honoria's favourite malady, "the creeps." "I am sorry to say we've had a little difference——"

"Oh, dear!" faltered Mrs. Maggs, gliding nervously to the tea-tray, which stood ready as usual, and beginning to make a feeble noise with the cups and saucers. "Oh, dear me, William! don't say so! One cannot have

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all sunshine, you know, dear William, in one's married life. I'm sure when Mr. Maggs was alive—ah! it seems only the other day he died, poor darling! (Lord bless the woman, he had been mouldering in his grave for eighteen years!)—we used often to have a little quarrel about things, especially about blue ties! I never could bear blue neckties, and he always *would* wear one on Sundays! It was really very tiresome, because we used to find the Sundays so disagreeable, you know—so—so unchristian! Of course it was my fault as much as it was his; both were to blame, and that is the way always with married people, dear William; both are to blame, it is never all on one side—it *can't* be—you must bear and forbear——”

Here she let fall the sugar-tongs with a clatter, and trailed off into unintelligible nothings.

“Yes, I know—I know all about that,” I said, making a desperate effort to be patient with this trembling, pale jelly of a woman, who always seemed on the point of dissolving into tears. “But the present matter is very serious, and it is becoming more and more serious every day. You see, when a man marries he wants a *home*——”

“Oh, my dear William, I'm sure you've *got* a home,” moaned Mrs. Maggs, turning her weak eyes reproachfully upon me. “You can't say you haven't—you really *can't*, William! A *beautiful* home! Why, the carpets

alone in it cost a small fortune, and as for the drawing-room curtains, they're good enough to make court-trains of—they positively *are*, William! Every bit pure silk, and all the flower-pattern raised! I can't imagine what you *can* want better! And I remember when that over-mantel was bought at Salvati's, all Venetian glass! I couldn't sleep a wink for nights and nights, thinking of it, and I went myself to see the men put it up, for I was *so* afraid they would break it, and it *was* so expensive! Why, you've got lovely things everywhere, William, and how *can* you say you want a home?"

By this time I was beginning to lose my equanimity.

"Dear me, madam," I snapped out testily, "you surely don't suppose it's the *furniture* that makes a home, do you! The drawing-room curtains won't cure me of misery; the Venetian mirror won't help me out of a difficulty!" My voice rose agitatedly. "I can't exist on the tables and chairs, can I? I can't make a friend and confidant of the carpet! I repeat, that when a man marries, he wants a home; and when I married your daughter Honoria, *I* wanted a home, and I haven't got it!"

"You haven't got it, William?" stammered Mrs. Maggs, approaching me, with a cup of that weak, over-sweetened tea she always made in her shaking hand. "You haven't got it, dear? Why, how is it that Honoria——"

I motioned the tea away with a tragic gesture, and my pent-up passion burst forth.

"Honor! is not a woman!" I exclaimed wildly—"not a whole woman by any means! She is half a man! She is a mistake; she is a freak of nature"—here I broke into a delirious laugh. "She should be exhibited as an eccentricity in some museum!"

This time I had achieved a feat not common to man—I had scared my mother-in-law! The poor feeble thing tottered back to the tea-tray and set down the cup I had just rejected; then nervously drawing her lace scarf round her shoulders, she quavered:

"Don't, William, don't. Oh! *don't* be so—so *dreadful*! You frighten me! You don't know what you say, William, you really don't. You've been taking something in the city, haven't you? There now, don't be offended, William! Will you have some soda water?"

I have said there were times when those who knew Mrs. Maggs well, yearned to shake her. One of those times had come now. It was with the greatest difficulty that I refrained from pouncing on her frail form and rendering her suddenly breathless. But I controlled myself; I made a desperate effort to be calm, and succeeded in merely surveying her with a proper manly scorn.

"You are very like your daughter in some respects," I said. "When you see a fellow as wretched as he can

be, suffering mental tortures more acutely than he can describe, you think him drunk! Very sympathetic, I'm sure!"

She smoothed her grey hair tremulously and produced her chronic smile.

"I'm sorry you are suffering, William, very sorry; but you needn't be so *rough*, dear! Tell me what's the matter. Has Honoria been flirting with Bobbie?"

"No," I answered proudly. "That is one thing I cannot accuse her of; she does *not* flirt. She has—I *will* say that for her—too great a sense of honour. She is guiltless of all feminine coquetries and petty vanities. She puts on no airs, and though she's handsome, she's not a bit conceited. She's good and honest—but—but she should never have married; she's not fit for it!"

"Not fit for it," whimpered Mrs. Maggs. "Oh, William! how cruel you are! Not fit for it! How *can* you say so?"

"I can *say* so because I've *proved* so," I replied bluntly. "I repeat—she's not fit for it. She should have lived in the world apart, alone, and worn her no-sex as best she could. She would have no doubt worn it admirably! As a wife she's out of her element; as a mother she's still further out of her element. A smoking, betting, crack shot is scarcely the person to undertake the commonplace care of an infant; a notable female

deer-stalker is not precisely suited to the *degradation* (and I emphasized the word bitterly) of marriage. In fact, it is because I feel the position of affairs as so extremely serious—serious even to the degree of possible mutual separation—that I have come to *you*, Mrs. Maggs, to ask you to speak to Honoria quietly, to reason with her, and point out how little her behaviour conduces to my happiness, and also how much she exposes herself to the ridicule and slanderous judgment of those who do not understand her as well as you and I do. A mother's arguments may win the day where those of a husband fail."

I had spoken with so much gravity that my mother-in-law's eyes now watered in real earnest, and she pulled out a filmy bit of a lace handkerchief and wiped away the tears effusively.

"It's no use, William," she snivelled weakly; "no use whatever *my* speaking to Honoria! She wouldn't listen to me for a minute; she never would when she was a child, and now she is married she'd only tell me I had no business to interfere. I used to say I thought it was very wrong for her to smoke and go shooting with that Mrs. Stirling—really a very vulgar woman—but she only laughed at me. She's got a great way of laughing at everything, has Honoria. But she's very clever, William; you *know* she is! Professor Muddlecums, who was here the other evening, said that she was *simply*

the most *wonderful* woman he ever met! Such a grasp of things, and such a memory! You mustn't mind, William, you really mustn't mind her smoking, and all that. I don't believe she could do without it; you know some of the papers say it's very soothing to the nerves. Don't *you* like smoking, dear?"

"I *used* to like it," I answered gloomily. "I don't now; Honoria has *sickened* me of it!"

"Dear, dear, that *is* a pity," and Mrs. Maggs's hovering hands went to work again in the usual style. "But perhaps you'll take to it again after a bit. Any way, *don't* ask me to speak to Honoria, William! I *couldn't*, you know! My heart is very weak, and I should be almost dead with nervousness. You must arrange your little matrimonial differences"—chronic smile once more—"between you; it never does any good to interfere. What! are you going?" For I had risen dispiritedly and was now making my weary way towards the door. "Won't you see baby before you go? He is such a dear *darling*, do see him!"

I hesitated, but there was a certain parental tugging at my heart-strings. After all, he was *my* child, and I wanted him to know me a little.

"Yes, I'll see him," I said briefly.

Whereupon Mrs. Maggs became mildly fluttered and pleased, and, opening the drawing-room door, she called up the stairs:

"Georgie! Georgie!"

"Yes," answered a clear girlish voice.

"Bring baby down; William's here, and wants to see him."

Another couple of minutes, and Georgie entered, carrying my young hopeful in her arms, clean and fresh as a rose, *not* screaming, *not* angry, as was his wont, but with a fat smile puckering up his small features into countless little wrinkles, and a fearless confidence shining in his round, big, honest blue eyes. The child was evidently perfectly happy, and I knew at once who had made him so.

"Thank you, Georgie," I said simply, as I shook hands with her.

"For what?" she asked, laughing.

"For taking such care of him."

"Nonsense!" And she set her burden down on the hearth-rug, where he immediately pulled off his woollen shoe and began eating it. "He wants scarcely any care, he's so good. Do you know I don't think we need more than one nurse; would you mind if we sent away the other?"

"Not at all," I replied. "Do as you like."

She seated herself in a chair and looked at her mother, smiling.

"Give me some tea, mammy dear," she said. "Haven't you had any, William?"

"No."

"Have some now, and keep me company," and, springing up, she peered doubtfully into the fresh cup Mrs. Maggs poured out, then shook her head in playful remonstrance.

"Too weak, mammy; William likes it rather strong. May I put some more tea in the pot?"

"I'm sure, Georgie," began her mother plaintively, "there's plenty in, only it doesn't seem to draw properly. I don't know how it is, the tea isn't half so good now it gets advertised on the walls so much; in *my* young days it was a luxury!"

"Yes, mother," laughed Georgie, who during this feeble chatter had been quietly manipulating the teapot, and now handed me a delicious cup, aromatic in odour and tempting to look at, "and now it's a positive necessity! All the worse, say the wise men, for us and our poor nerves. Oh, baby!" This as Master Tribkin uttered a sound something between a chuckle and a coo, expressive of his ecstasy at having found on the carpet a large tin-tack which he was laboriously striving to put in his eye. "Oh what an ugly thing for baby to play with! Auntie doesn't like it. See!" and she made the most comical little face of disgust and threw the objectionable nail out of the window; whereupon my infant became imitatively disgusted also, and in turn made eloquent signs of deep repulsion for the

vanished thing he had lately deemed a treasure; signs which were so excessively flabby and funny that Georgie laughed, and I, catching the infection from her, laughed also, heartily, and a trifle nervously too, for there was something very queer about my feelings just then. I tell you, let the "practical" period say what it will, a man *has* a heart; he is not a mere machine of wood and iron; and I was conscious of a soft and sudden sense of rest in Georgie's presence,—little Georgie, whom once I had scarcely noticed, the "scrub of a woman" looking just now the very picture of sweet maidenhood and modesty in her pretty white cotton gown, with a "fetching" little bunch of pansies and mignonette carelessly slipped into her waistband. I drank my tea in slow sips and surveyed her, while Mrs. Maggs sank languidly down in an arm-chair and heaved her heart-disease sigh.

"William is vexed," she began, glancing at me with a gently distrustful melancholy. "Georgie, William is vexed about Honoria."

"Yes?" and Georgie looked up quickly. "You do not want her to go to Mrs. Stirling's, I suppose?"

"No, I do *not*," I said emphatically. "Georgie, I'm sure *you* can understand——"

Georgie nodded. "Yes, I understand," she replied instantly. "But I'm *afraid* it's no use arguing about it."

William. She *will* go; nothing will dissuade her. *I've* spoken to her about it."

"You have? That was kind of you," I said. Then, after a pause I added, "You always were a kind little soul, Georgie. Richmoor's a lucky man!"

She smiled, and a warm blush swept over her cheeks.

"*I'm* lucky too," she answered softly. "You can't imagine, William, what a nice fellow *he* is!"

"I'm sure of that——" I hesitated, then went on desperately, "So you think it's best to let Honoria have her own way then this time, Georgie?"

"I'm *afraid* so," and she looked at me very sympathetically. "You see when she's away she may take a better view of things—she may even get tired of all those vulgar sporting men and women, and begin to long for her home, and—and for you, and the baby—and that would be *such* a good thing, you know!"

"Yes, it would," I answered despondently, "if it ever happened; but it *won't* happen!"

"Wait and see," said Georgie confidently. "Honoria's got a good heart after all; she can be very sweet if she likes, and if you don't thwart her just now she may completely alter her ideas. I think it's quite possible—it would be natural—for she's certain to give up sporting and hunting *some* day; it *can't* last——"

"Can't last? Of course it can't last!" declared Mrs. Maggs, unclosing her eyes, which had been shut till now

in placid resignation. "No woman can go on shooting for ever, William dear; why, she'll get old, you know, and she'll want to be quiet!"

"And I must wait till she *gets* old, I suppose; that's what you mean to imply?" I said with a haggard attempt at smiling. "All right; but age will not cure her of smoking, I fear! However, I won't bore you any more with my worries. Good-bye, Georgie!"

"Good-bye!" and she held out her hand; then, as I took it, she whispered, "I'm so sorry about it all, William—so sorry, I mean, for *you*."

"I know you are," I answered in the same low tone, and I pressed her kindly-clinging little fingers. "Never mind; every one has got troubles; why should I be an exception? Good-bye, youngster!"

This to my small son, who was now busy dragging all the music out of the music-stand in a cheerfully absorbed silence. "I suppose he'd scream if I took him up?"

"Oh, no," said Georgie; "he's not a bit shy; try him!"

Whereupon I lifted him gingerly in my arms, and he stared at me with deliberate and inquisitorial sternness. Suddenly, however, he burst into a wild war-whoop of delight, and patted my cheeks violently and condescendingly; and when I set him down again he was convulsed with laughter. I don't know why, but

sure. I cannot pretend to enter into an infant's sense of humour. I only realized that he was a very good-natured baby, and that his good-nature had never been apparent under the maternal roof. Mrs. Maggs bade me farewell very effusively.

"*Do* come and sit with us, dear William, in the evening whenever you feel lonely," she entreated mournfully; "and perhaps you can arrange to come down to Cromer with us also. We are going there for a little change of air; it will do baby so much good. We shall be quite pleased to have you, you know. Indeed, it is to be expected you will want to see your own baby sometimes, especially when you cannot see your own wife! You *will* come, won't you, William?"

I said I would think of it, and with a few more hurried words I departed. No good had come of my visit *there* I thought, as I shut the street door behind me; no good whatever, except the sight of Georgie. *She* was a refreshing glimpse of womanhood at any rate, and I dwelt on her pretty image in my mind with pleasure. I reached my own house and let myself in as usual with the latch-key; the place had a vacant and deserted air; the rooms smelt of stale tobacco, and a sense of despondency, loss, and failure crept over me as I stood for a moment looking in at the semi-darkened library, where I had passed so many solitary evenings. It was no good stopping at home I decided; the very

word "home" was a mockery to one in my position. I therefore did what every man does who finds his wife *unwifely* and his domestic surroundings uncomfortable; went down to my club to dinner, and returned no more till I returned to bed.

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## CHAPTER VII.

AUGUST was past and gone. September was drawing near its close; my wife had won fresh distinction as a sportswoman of the highest rank down at Glen Ruach, and I had spent a very quiet holiday at Cromer with Mrs. Maggs and all her family (seven boys and girls without counting Honoria), passing the time in making friends with my own infant son. And now the summer vacation was over; people were returning to town in straggling batches, and I returned amongst others. My wife had written to me now and then, chiefly on post-cards, and I had replied by the same cheap and convenient method of correspondence, which leaves no room for romance. *She* was not romantic, and if *I* had a vein of sentiment anywhere in my composition, I was determined not to make a display of it to *her* again. She was coming home; she had announced her intention of arriving on a particular evening which she named, and she had requested me not to bother about meeting her at the station. So I *didn't* bother about it. Georgie had been busy at our house—Mrs. Maggs also; preparing it and putting it in order for the return of its mistress, and all was in readiness—all ex-

cept the baby, who still remained with his young aunts and uncles and grandmother. The time fixed upon had come, and I sat at the library window looking out on the square and awaiting my wife's arrival. I had made up my mind to welcome her as an affectionate husband should; I had resolved that we would talk about our differences in a quiet and perfectly amicable manner, and that if she could not or would not resign her mannish habits out of love or respect for me, why, then I would in all gentleness suggest a mutually-agreed-upon separation. I hoped it would not come to this; but I was positively determined I would stand her masculine behaviour no longer. It had sickened me to the soul to read the various accounts of her that appeared from time to time in the "Society" papers. I had longed to thrash the insolent little paragraphists who wrote of her as the "Amazonian Mrs. Hatwell-Tribkin," "the stalwart Mrs. Hatwell-Tribkin," et cetera, especially when they finished off their descriptions with satirical exclamations, such as "Bravo, Honoria!" or "Well done for Mrs. H. T.!" I had felt every drop of blood in my body tingle with vexation whenever I saw her name bandied about in company with all the theatrical and "fast" notorieties of the day, but how could I complain? She had laid herself open to it; her conduct invited it, and if her gowns *were* described, and her good looks discussed and her "points" criticised as

though she were some fine mare for sale at Tattersall's, it was *her* fault—it was certainly not mine. I was tired of the whole business, and I had firmly and finally resolved that I would not consent to be known *merely* as the matrimonial appendage of Mrs. Hatwell-Tribkin. I would have a distinct personality of my own. There are too many weak, good-natured husbands about in society, who, rather than have continual rows with their wives, consent to be overshadowed and put to shame by their feminine arrogance and assumption of superiority. I tell these wretched beings once for all that they are making a woeful mistake. Let them assert themselves, no matter with how much difficulty and unpleasantness, and it will be better for them in the long run. The world will never blame any fellow for steadily refusing to live with a woman who, in mind and character, is more than half a man.

I waited, as I said, at the library window—waited and watched for Honoria's return, glancing from time to time at the evening papers and listening intently to every distant sound of cab wheels. At last I saw a hansom (one of those dangerously silent things, with tinkling bells which scarcely suffice to warn aside the unwary foot passenger) whirl round the corner of the square, with the well-known gun-case and portmanteau on top; in one minute it had stopped at the door; in another Honoria was out of it and in the hall.

"How do?" she exclaimed loudly as I went forth to greet her. (Naturally, I made no foolish attempt to kiss her.) "You look fairly fit! Here, Simmons!"—this to the man-servant—"take all my traps out and send them upstairs—half-a-crown fare—here you are!"

And she tossed him the coin and marched into the library with a firm, rather heavy tread, I following her in a deeply hurt and vexed silence, for I noticed at the first glance that she had cut her hair quite short. All those beautiful bright nut-brown tresses I had admired when I courted her were gone, and I had some ado to speak with any sort of gentleness.

"I see you have cut your hair, Honoria," I said, looking at her as she stood before me, tall and commanding as a grenadier guard, clad in her buttoned tweed ulster and deer-stalking cap. "I think you've spoilt yourself."

"Do you? I don't!" she retorted, taking off the cap and displaying a mass of short boy's curls all over her head. "It's ever so much cooler, and ever so much less troublesome. Excuse me, don't be shocked!"

And unfastening her ulster, she threw it off. Great heavens! what—what extraordinary sort of clothes had she got into! I mistrusted my own eyesight; were those—those nether garments *knickerbockers*? positively *knickerbockers*? Yes! by everything amazing and unfeminine they *were*! and over them came a loose blouse and

short—very short—frilled petticoat, something like the “Bloomer” costume, only several degrees more “man-nish” in make. I stared at her open-mouthed and utterly dismayed; so much so that I was speechless for the moment.

“My shooting costume,” she explained cheerfully. “It’s such a comfort to travel in, and no one sees under my ulster!”

“Would you care if any one *did* see, Honoria?” I inquired coldly.

“No, I don’t suppose I should,” she answered gaily, ruffling up her curls with one hand. “Well, Willie, as I said before, you look *fit*! Had a good time at Cromer? and are you glad to see me back again?”

“Of course, Honoria,” I replied in the same quietly unmoved tone; “of course I am glad to see you, but—well, we will talk over things presently. Supper is ready, I believe; will you not change your—your——”

And I pointed to the knickerbockers with, I think, rather a sarcaistical expression on my countenance. She flushed just a little; it must have been my glance that confused her for an instant; then, I suppose, a devil of mischief entered into her and made her obstinate.

“No, what’s the good of changing; such a bother!” she answered. “Besides, I’m as hungry as a hunter; I’ll sit down to supper as I am. Awfully comfortable, you know!”

"Honoriam!" I said with a sort of desperate politeness, "you must really pardon me! I refuse—I utterly refuse to sit at table with you in that costume! Do you want the very servants to giggle at you all through the meal?"

"They may giggle if they like," she replied imperturbably; "their giggles won't hurt *me*, I assure you!"

"Honoriam!" and I spoke with deliberate gentleness and gravity. "Will you oblige *me* by changing those masculine habiliments of yours, and dressing like a *lady*?"

She looked at me, laughed, and her eyes flashed.

"No, I won't!" she said curtly.

I bowed; then quietly turned round and left the room, and not only the room but the house. I went to my club and supped there, needless to say, with no enjoyment whatever, and with no heart to enter into conversation with any of my friends. I think most of them must have seen I was seriously put out, for they left me pretty much alone, and I was able to take counsel with myself as to what I should do next. I returned home late, and retired to a separate apartment, so that I saw no more of Honoriam till the next morning, when she came down to breakfast in her smoking-suit, *i.e.*, the same sort of skirt and large-patterned man's jacket she had surprised me with on the evening of our marriage day. I studied her attentively. Her skin, which had

recently been exposed so ruthlessly to the sun and wind on the grouse moors, was beginning to look rough and coarse; her eyes had a bold, hard, indifferent expression; her very hand, as she poured out the tea, was red and veiny, like that of a man accustomed to rough weather, and I realized with immense regret that her beauty would soon be a thing of the past; that it was even possible she might become positively ugly in an incredibly short time if she continued (as it was pretty evident she *would* continue) her masculine mode of life. It was she who first began the conversation that morning.

"Got over your temper, Willie? Do you know you're becoming a perfect demon?"

"Am I?" I said patiently. "I'm sorry, Honoria; I used to be considered a good-natured fool enough, but I've had a great deal to vex me lately, and I fancy you know the cause of my vexation."

"Yes," she answered indifferently, helping both me and herself to toast as she spoke; "I know, but I've settled all that. I never take long making up *my* mind! We must part—that's about the long and the short of the matter. We can't work together—it's no use, oars won't pull evenly—we shall only upset the boat. It's easily done—have an agreement drawn up as they do for house leases, sign it before witnesses, and we split—quite amicably—no fuss. And that will leave me free and comfortable for my lecturing tour,"

"Your lecturing tour!" I echoed, forgetting for a moment my own annoyances in the fresh surprise of this announcement. "Are you going a-lecturing, Honoria?" and despite my wish to be gentle, I am aware my voice was decidedly sarcastic in its inflection. "What on, pray? Politics or temperance? Do you like the idea of becoming a platform woman?"

"As well be a platform woman as a platform man," she replied with a touch of defiance. "I've got a good voice—better than most men's—and I've heaps to say. I met a Mr. Sharp down at Glen Ruach; he's an agent for that sort of thing—farmed out lots of lecturers both here and in the States; he's agreed to farm out *me*. Good terms too; he says he knows I'll 'draw' immensely. All expenses paid—in fact, you needn't bother about making me any allowance unless you want to for form's sake—I can earn my own living comfortably."

"Has he heard you lecture?" I inquired, ignoring this independent latter part of her speech. "Is he acquainted with your capabilities in that line?"

She smiled—a wide hard smile.

"Rather; I gave them all a taste of my quality down at Glen Ruach—lectured on Man—and I thought Sharp would have split with laughing! Awfully funny fellow, Sharp—Sharp by name and Sharp by nature. But he's first-class—awfully first-class! I signed the agreement with him before leaving."

"Without consulting *me*," I observed frigidly. "Very wifely and kind on your part, Honoria!"

"Oh, bother!" she said rapidly; "wives don't consult their husbands nowadays—that sort of thing's exploded. Each party manages his or her own affairs. Besides, I knew you'd make all manner of objections."

"Oh, you *did* know that!" and I looked at her steadfastly. "Well, Honoria, in that case perhaps it *will* be best to do as you say—mutually agree to separate, for a time at least; though you have not thought of the child in the matter; is he to be my care or yours?"

"Good gracious! Yours, of course," she replied very emphatically. "I can't go touring about the country with a shrieking brat! Has he roared old Mammy into deafness yet?"

"No, he has not," I said. "He has not indulged much in 'roaring,' as you call it, since he left your tender maternal care, Honoria!"

I pronounced the words "tender maternal care" with marked and slightly scornful emphasis. She glanced at me, and her full lips curled disdainfully.

"Look here, Mr. William Tribkin!" she announced. "You're a slow coach! that's what you are—a slow coach of very mediæval pattern! Your wheels want greasing; you take too long a time getting over the road! And you talk a vast deal of old sentimental rubbish, and I never could put up with sentimental

rubbish. I hate it! I hate fads too, and you are a faddist! You want me—*me*—to be a docile, thank-you-for-nothing-humble-servant-yours-faithfully sort of woman, dragging about the house with a child pulling at her skirts and worrying her all day long; you want to play the male tyrant and oppressor, don't you? but you *won't!* not with *me*, at any rate! You've got a free woman in me, *I* tell you, not a sixteenth-century slave! My constitution is as good as yours; my brain is several degrees better; I'm capable of making a brilliant career for myself in any profession I choose to follow, and you are and always will be a mere useful nonentity! You are——”

“Stop! that is enough, Honoria,” I said decisively, rising from the table. “You need not go out of your way to insult me—pray spare yourself! Mere ‘useful nonentity’ as I am, I am man enough to despise vulgar notoriety; and you, though your conduct is *unwomanly*, are still woman enough to court and eagerly accept that questionable distinction. As you so elegantly express it, I *am* a ‘slow coach;’ my ideas of womanhood are sadly old-fashioned indeed! I do not wish to play the ‘male tyrant,’ but I want to *feel* the part of the true lover and loyal husband, and this is an honour unhappily denied to me! Our marriage has been an error; it only remains to us now to make the best of our position. You wish

to go your way, and your way is distinctly not mine. As *you* will not submit to me, and *I* have not so completely ignored my manhood as to submit to *you*, why then it follows that we must separate; let us hope—let *me* hope, Honoria, that it may only be for a short time. You may rely on my pursuing the honourable fidelity I swore to you on our marriage day, and I——” I paused, then continued earnestly: “I would not insult you by presuming to question yours.” Again I waited; she was quite silent, but she drew from her side-pocket her case of cigarettes, and lighting one, puffed away at it in a meditative fashion. “This is a fast age, Honoria,” I went on regretfully, “and it breeds an unconscionable number of ‘fast’ women and men; but I want you to believe, if you can, that chivalry is not altogether extinct—that there are a few gentlemen left, of which class I hope I may humbly call myself one—a very poor-spirited, dull gentleman, no doubt, but who still would rather lead a lonely and uncheered life in the world than interfere with your happiness, or spoil what you imagine to be the brilliant promise of your independent career. You have never deemed yourself under any sort of authority to me—that would be too ‘old-fashioned’ a notion for an advanced feminine intelligence like yours”—here she puffed out the smoke from her lips in little artistic rings—“so that there is

no need to say to you, 'Be at liberty!' You *are* at liberty; you always have been—no doubt you always will be. But there are various sorts of liberty; one is the non-restraint and licence riskily enjoyed by young men about town, whose families are utterly indifferent to their fate (and this is what you seem to desire); another is that gentle latitude controlled by the affectionate solicitude and protection of those who love you better than themselves; another (and here we find the truest liberty of woman) is the freedom a wife possesses to guide and comfort and inspire to greatest ends her husband's life and career. Through woman's love, man performs his noblest labours. Believe it! Through woman's love, I say, not through woman's opposition! But I must apologise to you for talking sentimental rubbish again. It is understood that we agree to separate for the present, and I will call on my lawyer about the matter this afternoon. Half of every penny I have or earn shall be yours as is your just due; this house, which I shall vacate as soon as possible, is also at your service. And I hope, Honoria"—here I cleared my throat from an uncomfortable huskiness—"I hope this arrangement, though it seems necessary now, may not be of long continuance—I shall be a proud and happy man when the day dawns on which my wife and I can meet again and live together in that absolute sympathy I so earnestly desire!"

I ceased. She looked up through the cloud of tobacco-smoke that encircled her head, and there was just a little softness about her eyes which made them prettier for the moment. Taking her cigarette from her mouth, she flicked off the ash into her breakfast plate.

"You're a capital fellow, Will," she said; "regular first-class, only a *leetle* slow!" and she extended one hand, which I took and pressed earnestly in my own. "Look here, I tell you what! I'll get through my lecturing tour, and if you want me back after that, why, I'll come—honour bright!"

I sighed; released her hand gently and left her. I dared not inquire so far into the future; I hesitated to speculate as to whether I should indeed want her back *then*! However, our minds were unanimously made up on one point—namely, the advisability of separation for the present; and within the next few days the affair was quietly arranged, much to the distress of old Mrs. Maggs, who wept copiously when she heard of it, and for some mysterious reason known only to herself, persisted in calling my child a "poor orphan." Georgie said little, but no doubt thought the more, and was sweetly, silently sympathetic. My wife started for some big manufacturing town in the provinces, where she was to begin her lecturing campaign; our house was let for

twelve months (Honorias management—she was a wonderful business woman); the baby remained in the charge of his grandmother, and I took a set of chambers near Pall Mall and resumed a hum-drum bachelor life.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

THE cynical philosopher and the self-sufficient epicurean may now perhaps feel disposed to congratulate me on having easily and conveniently got rid of my wife; the modern Diogenes of the literary clubs may growl "Lucky man!" and the nineteenth-century Solomon of Hyde Park and Piccadilly may murmur over these pages: "There is nothing, under the circumstances, better for a fellow to do than to eat, drink and be merry all the days of his life, for whatever cometh *not* of these is vanity!" But, truth to tell, I was not in an enviable condition at all. The resumption of a solitary existence in chambers was far from agreeable to me; for I had passed the age when going to the theatre seemed the chief glory of life, and I had not yet arrived at that matured paunchiness when to dine well and drink good wine till the nose becomes rosy and lustrous, is the acme of every sensible man's ambition. So that I was very lonely, and very conscious of my loneliness. The gaunt, pious and respectable female who attended to my rooms was not exactly the sort of person one would choose to provide a drooping spirit with mental cheer; the hall porter at my club—an exceedingly

friendly fellow—seemed sorry for me now and then, but refrained from inviting me to weep out my woes upon his brass-buttoned breast. True, I visited my mother-in-law's house frequently—saw the fair little Georgie and her betrothed earl, and looked on mournfully at their demurely graceful love-making; and I danced my infant son on my knee to Banbury Cross and back again with much satisfaction, finding that every time I did it his soft chuckles became more and more confidential, and that though at present his language was unintelligible, he evidently meant it kindly. Still I had the feeling upon me of being a desolate and deserted man, and though I absorbed myself as much as possible in books and made the best of my position, I could not deem myself happy. Life, which I had fancied rounded into completion when I married, seemed now broken off in some strange and uncouth way—it was like one of those odd-looking roses that through blight or disease bloom half-petalled, and never get shaped into the perfect flower.

Honoria had been a long time absent in the provinces; fully five months had passed since our parting, and the February of the new year was now just at an end. I had never heard from her all that time, neither had she written to any member of her own family. Her allowance had been paid to her regularly through her bankers, and so far as I knew she was well and flourish-

ing. Now and again I heard far-off rumours of Mrs. Tribkin's ability as a lecturer, but I rather avoided all those newspapers in which her doings were likely to be mentioned. I shrank from the pennyworths of scandal, called by courtesy *journals*, lest I should find her name figuring ridiculously in a set of vulgarly worded paragraphs, such as are sometimes strung together for the sake of gratuitously insulting our good and noble Queen in her old age (I wonder what British officers are about, by-the-by, that they let this sort of thing go on without a single soldierly and manful protest?), and thus it happened that to me it was almost as if my wife were dead, or at any rate gone on some exceedingly far journey from which it seemed highly probable she would never return. So that I received a positive shock of surprise one afternoon when, on arriving at my club, I found a letter addressed to me in the big bold handwriting which was like nobody's in the world, so thoroughly characteristic was it of Honoria, and of Honoria alone. I opened it with a sort of eager trepidation. Was she regretting the step she had taken, and was this to propose a friendly meeting with a view to partnership in joy and sorrow once more? A thick card dropped out of the envelope;—I picked it up without looking at it; my eyes were fixed on the letter itself—my wife's letter to me—which ran as follows:

"DEAR WILLIE,—

"I've done the provinces, and am coming to London to give a lecture in Prince's Hall, Piccadilly. As you've never heard me hold forth, I enclose a Ticket—Five Shilling Fauteuil—so I hope you'll be comfortable! It's a good seat, where you'll have a straight view of me any way. How are you? First-class, I hope. *I* never was better in my life. Am leaving for the States in the middle of March, they're 'booming' me there now. I'm beating all the 'Whistling Ladies' hollow! Would you like to dine with me at the Grosvenor before I start? If so, come behind the platform after the lecture and let me know.

"Yours ever,

"HONORIA HATWELL-TRIBKIN."

Dine with her at the Grosvenor! She seemed to entirely forget that I was her *husband*—her separated, deserted husband! It was the letter of a man to a man, yet she was my *wife*—parted from me—but still my wife. Dine with her at the Grosvenor! Never—never! I put the letter back in its envelope with trembling fingers, and then looked at the ticket—the "Five Shilling Fauteuil." Good heavens! I thought I should have tumbled in a swooning heap on the carpet, so great was my astonishment and dismay! This is what I read:

## PRINCE'S HALL, PICCADILLY.

## LECTURE

BY

MRS. HONORIA HATWELL-TRIBKIN.

**Subject: "ON THE ADVISABILITY OF MEN'S APPAREL  
FOR WOMEN."**

- HEADINGS: 1. The inconvenience of women's dress generally.  
2. The superior comfort enjoyed by men.  
3. Cheapness, quality, and durability of men's clothing.  
4. The advantages of Social Uniformity.

**N.B.—The Lecturer will give from time to time Practical Illustrations  
of her theory.**

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TO COMMENCE AT 8 P.M. PRECISELY.

**FAUTEUIL, 5s.**

**ADMIT ONE.**

Men's apparel for women! Social uniformity! Practical illustrations of the theory! Ye gods! I gasped for breath, and staggered to an arm-chair, wherein I sank exhausted by the excess of my wonder! The idea of the "practical illustrations" was what worried me. I tried to imagine their nature, but failed in the effort. I could not conceive any "practical illustrations" on such a subject possible—in public! Would she have an assorted pile of men's garments on a table beside her, and taking them up one by one, point out their various attractions? Would she discourse eloquently on the simplicity of the shirt; the rapid sliding-on of the trousers; the easy charm of the waistcoat, and the graceful gaiety of the "monkey-jacket?"

Would she attempt to describe the proper setting of a stiff collar, for instance? No! let her not *dare* such a task as this! Let her not presume to touch on that supremest point of sublime masculine agony! My own collar became suddenly ill-fitting as I thought of it, and hitched up against my ear. Full of that wild rage which convulses a man when his linen worries him, I flew to the looking-glass and busied myself for some minutes setting it straight, my countenance darkening into an apoplectic red as I strained at the starchy button-hole and refractory button. D——n it! There! it was all right now; and heaving a sigh of relief, I sat down again and fell into a melancholy reverie. I would *not* go and dine at the Grosvenor with that wonderful wife of mine (everybody said she was wonderful, and I don't deny it); no, I would *not*! But should I go and hear her lecture? This was the question that now tormented me. Perhaps it would be wise on my part; perhaps my very presence would arouse in her mind some touch of remorse, some tinge of regret, for days that once had been; ah! days that once had been! That sounded like poetry, and I knew where I had heard it. A sweet maid of about fifty had sung it at Mrs. Maggs's the other evening in a voice that sounded rather like a penny whistle which had got a drop of water into it by mistake. I hummed it under my breath sentimentally:

"We wandered by the little rill  
That sparkled o'er the green,  
And oh! we lov'd the mem'ry still  
Of days that once, o-once ha-ad been!"

Ah! rills might "sparkle" over any amount of "green," but Honoria would never wander by them more; never—never! She never *had* wandered, and she never *would* wander; the wandering business was reserved for me! Here I recognized that my thoughts were becoming confused, and rising, I thrust my wife's letter and the five shilling ticket into my pocket, determining to think no more about it.

As a matter of fact, however, I *did* think more about it. I thought about it so much that at last I could not get it out of my head. The "subject" of that threatened dissertation "On the Advisability of Men's Apparel for Women" wrote itself on the air before me. I found myself looking into tailors' shops with a morbid curiosity, and wondering how such and such a check or striped pattern would suit pretty little Georgie, who in the June of that year was to be made Countess of Richmoor; and then I took to fancying how I, a specimen of despised and wretched man, should figure in one of those lustrous silk brocades and dainty gossamer stuffs that filled the drapers' plate-glass windows; for if women liked men's apparel so much as to wear it, why then, if only for the sake of trade, apart

from the question of contrast, men would have to go into trains and tight bodices. Everything was going to be turned topsey-turvey, I dismally decided; this planet had surely got an awkward tilt from some mischievous demon of misrule, and we were all going mad or eccentric in consequence. *My* brain was in a whirl anyway, and that wretched "Bobbie" with the moustaches seemed to know it. I met him one day by chance; he was still "on the river," though it was winter-time; he was painting and decorating the interior of his "little house-boat" with Wonderall's Enamel or something of that kind. He looked more like a "penny novelette" hero than ever, and of course *he* was fully aware of Honoria's lecturing powers.

"Oh, I should go and hear her if I were you," he said, with a languid lifting of his eyelids, which was a trick of his, practised in order to display the length of his dark lashes and the feminine softness of his big brown eyes. "She's *awfully* clever, you know; regular A One! Her 'subject' too will 'draw' immensely. If I were not on the river just now I'd go too, I really would! It's sure to be capital fun!"

Thoughtless young brute! "Capital fun!" for *me*? Did he actually think so? I suppose he did; he was a perfect idiot on all "subjects" save boating—a mere fish! Scrape his gills and cook him for dinner! That meaningless absurdity of a phrase came ringing back

on my ears with all the delirious pertinacity of its first suggestion, and I parted from him abruptly in no very friendly mood. He told me I looked "seedy" as he went on his way, and I fancied I saw a smile of amused compassion under those long moustaches of his—a smile for which I loftily despised him.

Finally, after much painful hesitation, I resolved to be present at my wife's lecture, and having once made up my mind, felt a little more at ease. I tried to get into that cynical don't-care mood that some fellows are able to adopt very quickly when their wives prove disappointing, but I am (unfortunately) rather a soft-hearted booby, and it will take a good while to turn me into a downright hard-as-nails business curmudgeon. I've made several efforts in that direction; efforts which my podgy and dimpled son invariably causes to come to naught with one blow of his chubby fist, and one chuckle of his remarkably abstruse language. However, let that pass; I know there are a good many men like me, so I'm not alone in my folly!

The evening—the fated, fatal evening—came at last, and by half-past seven I was so much excited that I found it would be impossible to walk calmly to Prince's Hall without attracting attention by my erratic behaviour. I felt that I should grin convulsively, gesticulate and talk to myself on the way, in exactly the same fashion that old Bowser of the Stock Ex-

change does when he's annoyed, much to the surprise and amusement of staring street passengers. So to avoid unpleasantness I took a hansom. I must not omit to mention that I had told Mrs. Maggs and all her household about it. Mrs. Maggs had wept, Georgie had sighed, and the other members of the family had exchanged comical glances one with the other, but none of them would accompany me to hear Honoria's eloquence. Her "subject" seemed to them rather more alarming than attractive. I told Richmoor and he shrugged his shoulders, looked amiable as was his wont, and pressed my hand with particular warmth and sympathy, but he made no remark, nor did *he* volunteer to support me in the trial I had resolved to undergo. For it *was* a trial—it *is* a trial to any true man to see his wife made vulgarly notorious. I can pity from my soul the set-aside husbands of "professional" beauties and "society" actresses; I can sympathize with them—I *do* sympathize with them! And I would advise young fellows who have not yet made up their minds where to choose a wife, to avoid taking one from any public exhibit. Don't marry a "beauty" out of a prize-show; don't take a Dulcinea of the bottle and tap; don't select a smoking, betting, "crack-shot" and sports-woman, as I, in blind ignorance, did; don't give any preference to a female anatomist and surgeon, who knows the names of every bone and muscle in your body; in

fact don't take any "celebrity" at all, unless her celebrity be worn with that grand unconscious simplicity which marks a sweet woman's nature as well as a great genius's career. But I mustn't stop to moralize—the married clergymen who run away with young girls will do that much better than I can. My business is to relate the sufferings I underwent at that never-to-be-forgotten discourse "On the Advisability of Men's Apparel for Women." As I said, I took a hansom, and was driven up to the door of Prince's Hall in a stylish, plunging manner, that did considerable credit to the guiding Jehu of the course, and found a large number of people filing in, men and women. Among the latter I noticed several of the "fine" bouncing type of girl, such as Honoria had been when I first made her acquaintance. There was a good deal of sniggering and laughing, I thought uncomfortably, especially on the part of some carelessly attired gentlemen with rather rough hair, whom I afterwards discovered to be reporters for the different newspapers. Was—was the *Daily Telegraph* represented? I really don't know, but I should say it was. I cannot imagine any corner of the earth, air or ocean where that sublimely sonorous organ of the Press is *not* represented!

I could not find my *fauteuil*, and a shabby gentleman in a threadbare dress suit, with a much-worn pair of lavender kid gloves, came to my assistance, took my

ticket, and beckoned me in a ghostly manner to follow him. I obeyed, with a deep sense of confusion upon me. Did he guess I was the lecturer's despised husband, I wondered? and was that the reason why he smiled so spaciouly, displaying a set of extremely yellow teeth, as I stumbled with a muttered "Thanks!" into the middle of the very front row of *fauteuils*, right opposite the platform? It was very warm, I thought; excessively so for March! and furtively wiping my heated brow, I looked about me. The hall was filling fast, and the suppressed sniggering and laughter continued. Two of the gentlemen with the disorderly hair before mentioned were ushered respectively into the seats on each side of me. They were stout and I was thin, so that I seemed to be thrown in casually between them, like the small piece of meat in a station sandwich. They were old acquaintances evidently, and conversed now and then with each other behind my back; one scattering odours of recent ale from his beard, the other dispensing a warm onion breath down my neck. But I was always a timid man and a patient one. I did not like to move from the seat Honoria had specially chosen for me, and I never was successful in the art of casting indignant glances out of the corner of my eye, so I sat very quiet, fumbling nervously with the printed "Synopsis of Lecture," which was a mere repetition of what had already been announced on the ticket of

admission, and waiting, in really dreadful suspense, for my wife's appearance.

The hall was now pretty full, a good many stragglers occupying the balcony as well; they were admitted, I afterwards heard, for the modest sum of threepence. Eight o'clock struck, and punctual to the minute there stepped briskly on the platform a young fellow who was greeted with quite a burst of tumultuous shouting and applause. I gazed at him doubtingly. I supposed he had come to say that Mrs. Tribkin was not quite ready, but that she would appear immediately; when he suddenly smiled and gave me a friendly nod of recognition. Good heavens! "the young fellow" was Honoria herself! I turned faint and giddy with surprise—*Honoria?* Yes! it *was* Honoria, dressed precisely like a man, in an ordinary lounge suit of rough tweed, the only difference being that the coat was rather more ample in its skirts and was made to come slightly below the knee. I stared and stared and stared, till I thought my eyes would have dropped out of my head on the floor! Shirt-front, high collar, necktie, waistcoat, trousers, everything complete, there she was all ready; ready and willing to,—*to make a fool of herself!* Yes, it was nothing more or less than this; and I realized it with smarting indignation and shame! Had I not occupied such a prominent seat I should then and there have left the hall; indeed I was almost on the point of doing so, when her voice struck through the

air with that resonant vibration it always possessed,—the subdued murmur and giggling of the audience ceased, and there was an expectant silence.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said the lecturer, “you are very welcome!” Here she raised her hat and smiled benignly. (I forgot to mention that she wore a regular “deerstalker” when she first came on, for the sole reason, as it now appeared, of “practically illustrating” the careless mode of a man’s salutation.) “You see *how* I greet you, easily and without affectation! I do not curtsey to you like a milkmaid receiving an unexpected shilling, nor do I perform a back-sweeping, smirking reverence like a fashionable prima donna who desires her audience to mentally calculate the cost of her gown before testing the value of her voice. I raise my hat to you; I put it down altogether—a simple action which signifies that I am at home with you for the present, so perfectly at home that I have no intention of taking an abrupt leave!” Another smile, and the “deerstalker” was placed on a chair beside her, and a violent clapping of hands, mingled with some faint “bravoes,” rewarded these first sentences. She ruffled up her short hair, and bringing the lecturing desk more into position turned over the pages of a manuscript thereon with a considering air, thus giving the audience time to study her through their opera-glasses, and the reporters to take notes.

"Fine woman, isn't she?" whispered the ale-odorous man behind me to his press comrade.

"Can't tell," replied this other imperturbably. "Wants her own clothes on to show her off. She may have a shape, or she may not; that coat defies detection."

They laughed silently, and went to work scribbling in their note-books; while I wondered drearily how long I should be able to endure my horrible martyrdom. I pictured myself as suddenly rising in my *fauteuil* with hands uplifted in frantic protest at the whole performance; or perhaps, and this seemed more probable in my overwrought condition, I should *laugh*—laugh so loudly and so long, that I should be taken for a lunatic, and led out of the hall by the gentleman with the yellow teeth and lavender kids, who would straightway confide me to the care of a policeman. If I could only get away from those two reporters! But I could not; I was the sandwich of Fate—the meat between the bread—and bit by bit Misery was devouring me!

And in another minute Honoria began, and I listened like one who hears awful nothings in a bad dream. Against the "inconvenience of women's dress generally" she poured the most violent denunciations; of heavy skirts, that clog the movements of the nether limbs (*she* said "legs" openly, but I have too much respect for the scruples of my dead grandmother to transgress so far), of numerous and unnecessary petticoats; of corsets, of

"busks" (what *are* "busks?"), of "bustles," of "pads," of "cushions," of "steels," of low necks and short sleeves (here let *me* put in a word and say frankly that I like these;—I think a pretty neck, when not indecently exposed, and a pretty pair of rounded white arms, are most fascinating studies to the eye of miserable man, who has few pleasures, Heaven knows, and who will have fewer still if the women are all going to be strong-minded); of long hair pinned up in heavy brain-stupefying coils with diamond pins that drag, and tortoiseshell pins that break; of bodices that button in all manner of odd places where fastening them becomes a difficulty—at the side, at the back, under the arm, and on the shoulder; of court trains, their length, their weight, their costliness, and their absurdity (they give splendour to the Queen's Drawing-room, though, and are a boon and encouragement to the silk trade); of jewels and other useless adornments; of bouquets, made at great expense and carried with infinite trouble; of fans, and the affectation the use of them implies; ay, down to the long glove with its innumerable tiny buttons, which take *some* people nearly half-an-hour to fasten (I remembered Richmoor was never so happy as when he was gingerly at work putting all Georgie's little glove-buttons through their respective holes; he was such a time about it, and he could talk such a lot of nonsense while thus employed)—of all these mystic things, and

more than these, Honoria discoursed volubly and dictatorially, showering scorn on the vanity, frivolity, and total want of intelligence displayed by the feminine mind that could continue to countenance such follies in the way of clothing. "Simplicity," she said, or rather shouted, thumping her manuscript as she spoke—"simplicity and comfort are the two main principles to be observed in the garmenting of human beings. From the earliest ages of history down to our own time the race has shown a barbaric tendency towards a superabundance of adornment, which is most pernicious, and fatal to true intellectual progress. From the traditional fig-leaf, man came, according to the Bible, to the wearing of coats of skins; then followed in sequence the absurd trinkets such as beads, belts and head-ornaments, which to this day render the appearance of a mere savage ridiculous! It is against these useless parts of costume that women should open their campaign, and so make a wider advance upon that glorious land of freedom of which they have only just crossed the border!"

Here she drew herself up with an air of defiance, and directed a glance of supreme contempt at *me*! Yes, I'm positive it was meant chiefly for me, though it swept over and encompassed with its withering light the two reporters, who bent over their note-books and went into noiseless spasms of mirth.

"When I come to consider," she resumed in tragic

tones, "the second division of my lecture, namely, the superior comfort enjoyed by men, my whole soul rises up in arms against the *odious* contrast!" (Voice from the balcony, "Hear, hear! Go it, young feller!") "Why, in Heaven's name—*why*, I ask, *should* men enjoy superior comfort? They boast of their physical strength! How long, I should like to know, would their physical strength endure if they were weighted down with the heavy skirts worn by women? Could they walk twenty-five miles a day in women's boots? Could they play cricket or football in women's corsets? *No!* Thus it is plainly evident that they enjoy superior physical strength *only* because they are properly clothed; they have the free use of their limbs; they are not hampered in any movement; they can go out in all weathers and not suffer in consequence. There is no reason either in law or nature why they *should* possess this advantage. Women, by adopting their style of dress, will secure to a great extent much of their muscular and powerful physique—a condition of things which is greatly to be desired. It is acknowledged by all impartial and advanced thinkers that men and women are, viewed as human beings merely, absolute *equals*; therefore it is necessary to equalize everything that seems to set a false dividing distinction between them, and the question of clothing is one of the most important to be considered. Now I will ask you, ladies and gentlemen, to

look at *me*," and she advanced unblushingly to the edge of the platform. "Is there anything incongruous in *my* appearance?" ("Rather so," cried the irresistible person in the balcony; but, whoever he was, his voice was promptly stifled.) "I am perfectly comfortable; I walk with ease"—here she strode up and down manfully, while I leaned back in my *fauteuil* and shut my eyes. "Here"—I opened them again—"here are the various convenient pockets which hold so many things without confusion." (I realized that this was a "practical illustration," and observed her with melancholy attention.) "And I would remind you, ladies and gentlemen, that women, as a rule, are only provided with *one* pocket." ("Oh, oh, Honoria," shouted a man in some far corner, "what of their husband's pockets?") He—she—my wife—paid no attention to this interruption, and went on composedly. "Only *one* pocket, which scarcely suffices to contain the purse, handkerchief and card-case. Now, in this," here she felt in the left-hand slit of her jacket, "I have my cigarettes, for I smoke, of course; in this," another illustrative gesture, "my cards and handkerchief; in this my keys; in this my purse, and so on. There is a place for everything, and everything is *in* its place! The waistcoat I wear is soft and yielding to the figure; it is warm without being oppressive, and no woman who has not yet worn them can properly estimate the comfort of *trousers*!"

Here the decorous gravity of the audience entirely gave way, and the whole place rang with laughter. The gentleman in the balcony became wildly obstreperous and exclaimed spasmodically, "Hooray! True for you, my boy. Go it, go it!" till he was smothered once more into silence. The laughter lasted some seconds, and the reporter on my left hand, the man with the beery beard, wiping away the moisture of merriment from his eyes, bent towards me in the openness of his heart and whispered confidentially, "What a game, isn't it?"

I looked at him with a sad and frozen stare—I was too wretched to be indignant—and managed to force a smile and stiff nod of assent. He seemed rather taken aback by my expression, for the mirth passed off his face, leaving only a whimsical surprise. He mused within himself for a while, and again the ale-scented beard approached my ear.

"Know her, perhaps, do you?"

"I—I knew her once!" I replied sombrely.

He glanced at me more curiously than before.

"I wonder where her husband is?" was his next remark.

"Can't imagine," I said with curt and desperate sternness.

He relapsed into meditative silence, and began drawing a little caricature of Honoria on a blank page of his note-book. She meanwhile resumed:

"I am very glad, ladies and gentlemen, that I have provoked you to laughter—very glad, as this behaviour on your part convinces me more than ever of the value of my theory! All great ideas have been first laughed at ever since the world began. The notion of steam as a motive power was laughed at; the Atlantic cable-wire was laughed at; and naturally the proposition of men's clothing for women must, like all other reforming propositions, be at the outset laughed to scorn also. But nevertheless it will take root—it *is* taking root—and it will win its way in spite of all opposition. Certain objections have been raised to my views on behalf of trade; the question as to what would become of a large portion of trade if women dressed like men has often been represented to me as a very serious obstruction. But *I* say that the freedom, health, and comfort of women are more to be considered than any trade! Let trade take care of its own concerns as best it may! Injured in one branch it will balance itself in another, and we are not bound to take it at all into our calculations. The liberty—the perfect liberty—of Woman is what we have to strive for; and part of this grand object will be attained when we have secured for her the untrammelled physical condition boasted of and enjoyed by her would-be oppressor, Man!"

"Say, would you nurse the babies in jacket and trousers?" asked some one at the back of the hall, in a

high nasal tone which was distinctly Transatlantic. A ripple of laughter again ran through the audience, and Honoria looked about her defiantly.

"It is not my province to reply to the queries of mere vulgar impertinence," she snapped out;—(cries of "Oh, Oh!"). "There seems to be some inebriated individual present. Let us hope he may be persuaded to retire!"

Then ensued a vast deal of officious scrambling on the part of the gentleman with the yellow teeth, and a general confused murmur, which ended in the "inebriated individual" openly standing up and showing himself to be a tall, rather fine-looking fellow, with that sort of ease and good-humour about him which often characterizes the Western American settler.

"I'm not 'inebriated,' my gel," he observed cheerfully; "but I'll leave this hall at once with a good deal more pleasure than I came into it. Why, it riles me all the wrong way to hear you going on like this about equality in clothes and such-like nonsense! Go home, my gel, go home, and get into a pretty gown and fal-lals; take two or three hours to fix yourself before your looking-glass if you like, and when you've rigged yourself up as sweet and pretty as you can be, see if you don't make more way with the ruling of man than you ever will prancing on a platform! That's all I want to

say. I'm off home, and apologise for interrupting the performance! Good-night!"

And amid the smiles and encouraging glances of the whole audience, the long-limbed "inebriate" departed amiably; and as he went I saw him "tip" the gentleman with the yellow teeth, who became crook-backed with servility in consequence. With his departure, Honoria took up the thread of her discourse, but she was now very angry and evidently very impatient. Her Transatlantic visitor had put her into an extremely bad humour. She made short work of the "Cheapness, quality, and durability of men's clothing," but when she reached the "Advantages of Social Uniformity" she became positively tempestuous. Regardless of coherence or sequence, she raged against the "contemptibility of the system of marriage as now practised;" of the "drudgery" and "degradation" inflicted on women who thus fulfilled their "miserable" (but still natural) destiny; of the "crushing" methods employed deliberately by the male sex to break the spirit and render insupportable the position of the feminine; and touching on the subject of "love" she seemed to grow inflamed inwardly and outwardly with scorn.

"Love!" she exclaimed derisively. "We all know what it is nowadays—a silly and always condescending consent to 'spoon' on the part of the man, and an equally silly but disgracefully ready willingness to *be*

'spooned' on the part of the girl who is not yet awake to the responsibilities of her position! Nothing more than this! It is ridiculous! What can be more utterly absurd than to see a free and independent woman allowing her hand to be kissed—or her lips, for that matter—by a so-called 'lover,' who is after all accepted merely as a business-partner in life, and who pays her these grotesque attentions only as a sort of immense favour, out of his offensive benevolence for her supposed weakly-clinging and helpless nature? Oh, it is time we should rebel against such complacent affabilities! It is time, I say, that women who are resolved to walk in the full light of liberty, should cast off the trammels of old barbaric custom and prejudice, and adopt *every* right, *every* privilege, which the other sex wish to debar her from enjoying! Let ultra-foolish feminine minds cling, if they *will* do so, to the delusion that man's love will protect and defend them; that it is their chief glory of life to be loved; and that their chief aim is to render themselves worthy of love; these are the wretched dupes of their own imaginations, and their intellects will never expand! True progress is barred to them; the door of wisdom is slammed in their faces! Those who wilfully choose this chimera called Love, must sacrifice everything else; it is a binding, narrowing influence in which one life depends almost entirely upon the other, that other often proving too feeble and insufficient to sup-

port even itself! Be free, women—be free! Freedom never palls, Independence never satiates, Progress never tires! Be ashamed to allow men *one iota* of that ‘superiority’ they wrongfully claim to possess! Dispute with them for *every* inch of the ground in *every* profession that you are desirous of entering; and beware—beware of yielding one single point of your hardly-gained independence! *They* will flatter you; they will tell the plainest of you that she is a Venus, to gain their own private ends; they will make big eyes at you, and will sigh audibly when they find themselves next to you at a concert or theatre; but these tricks are practised for a purpose—to inveigle and dupe you into becoming their *slaves*! Resist them—resist them with your utmost might! You will find the task easier when you have thrown aside all useless frippery and adornment, and adopted their garments, and with their garments their liberty! They will accept you *then* as equals, as comrades, as friends”—(“No, they won’t!” shouted the person in the balcony)—“they will leave off their foolish, unbecoming endearments”—(“By Jove, that they certainly will!” cried the voice again)—“and you will occupy that distinct equality of position which will entitle you, if intellectually gifted, to rank with all the male geniuses of the century! Freedom!—that should be woman’s watch-word. Freedom!—entire and absolute! Fight for it, women! Work for it—die for it, if need

be—and resist to the last gasp the treacherous enslavement and drudgery called *Love* imposed upon you by man!”

With this rhodomontade she concluded, rolled up her manuscript, gave it a thump, and bowed. Of course the audience applauded her to the echo, so great was their good nature and sense of the ridiculous; and when she clapped on her “deerstalker” and marched off the platform, they summoned her back again, just for the fun of seeing her lift that hat of hers in airy response to their demonstrations. The reporters on each side of me rose. I rose also and groped for my overcoat under the seat.

“She’s great fun,” said the man with the beard to his comrade, yawning capaciously; “she’s going to the States, isn’t she?”

“Yes,” replied the other; “she’ll draw there, and no mistake!”

“I wonder,” said the first speaker again musingly—“I wonder where the poor devil of a husband is?”

“Far enough away, I should think,” returned his friend. “These sort of women never have any husbands—they take ‘business partners,’ don’t you know—and whenever there’s a difference of opinion, they split!”

Getting their coats on they sauntered down the hall, grinning—I following them with dazed, aching eyes and

a burning brow. I glanced back once, and once only, at the now vacant platform. Ah! you may wait, Honoria—you may wait as long as you please, expecting to see me come to you and make an appointment to “dine at the Grosvenor,” but you will wait in vain! The “degradation” of a husband shall never afflict you more; the “contemptibility” of the married state shall never again debar you from the enjoyment of your masculine independence! William Hatwell-Tribkin removes himself from your path, and the only reminder you will ever have of his existence, is your allowance, paid quarterly, through your bankers, with unflinching regularity and exactitude! Thus I mused, as I mingled with the crowd pouring itself out of Prince’s Hall, and heard the jeers and sneers and “chaff” freely bestowed on the lady lecturer by several members of her late audience.

“What a cure she looked!” said one man, as he elbowed himself past me.

“What a fool she made of herself!” remarked another; “I wonder she isn’t ashamed!”

“Ashamed! My dear fellow, don’t expect ladies in trousers to be ashamed of anything! Their blushing days are past!”

After hearing this, I made haste to pass through the throng and escape into the open air as speedily as possible, for though Honoria might not be able to blush, *I* blushed for her—blushed so painfully that I felt my

blood tingling to the very tips of my ears. To be compelled to listen while my wife's name was bandied about from one to the other with careless jest and light impertinence was exceedingly bitter to me; and I breathed a sigh of relief when I found myself in the outer vestibule. Here, close by the door, were two individuals—young men—one apparently propping up the other, who was almost in a dying condition of laughter. Laughing so much, indeed, that it appeared he could not stop himself, and again and again his explosive guffaws broke out, till he laid his head feebly back against the wall with his mouth still open, and shutting his eyes, pressed one hand upon his side, and seemed about to slip helplessly on the ground, a convulsed prey to excess of risibility. His companion was laughing too, but less violently.

"Come home, old fellow! I say, *do* come home," he implored; "don't stand grinning there! You'll have a crowd round you—come on!"

"I can't!" gasped the hilarious one; "I shall drop down on the way! Oh, by Jove! Wasn't it just *rich*! The comfort of trousers! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! And she *wore* them! Ha, ha, ha! That was the best of it, she *wore* them! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"


And off he went again into hysterical spasms. I surveyed him with mild wonder and scorn; it was rather dark, and at first I could not distinguish his features

very clearly, especially in their contorted condition; but as I passed out into Piccadilly and had the advantage of the brilliant light over the doorway I saw and recognized him — recognized him with more indignation than a whole dictionary of powerful epithets could express; it was that horrid “Bobbie!” Bobbie with the moustaches! Wretch! *Not* “on the river” this time—not *in* the river, where in that first savage moment I would have willingly pitched him! He had actually come to grin at Honoria, and gloat over *my* misery, and make game, in his sublimely idiotic fashion, of the whole spectacle! It was a wonder I did not knock him down on the spot; but he did not appear to see me, and I marched haughtily past him and his noodle-looking friend, out into Piccadilly, where I solemnly swore, before all the coming and going omnibuses, that if ever I met the fellow again I would cut him dead! Not that he would mind that a bit, but it would at any rate be some slight satisfaction to *my* deeply wounded feelings!

And now there remains but little more to add to this “plain unvarnished” domestic history. With that night—that wretched night—ended all the hope I had ever entertained of coming to a better and happier understanding with Honoria. *She* is still famed for her masculine prowess, and *I*, in consequence, am still a lonely man. My boy goes to school now—a bright little chap, who up to the present has never seen his mother since

his unreflective infancy. He takes his holidays at Richmoor House, in Kent, whither I accompany him, and behold in little Georgie a womanly wife who knows how to make her husband perfectly happy. But all the same, *my* wife is notorious, and the young Countess of Richmoor is *not*. Georgie never gets into the papers at all, except when she is mentioned in the list of ladies at the Queen's Drawing-room; Honoria is always figuring in them, in season and out of season. She has lectured in America; she has lectured in Australia; she has made the tour of all the world. She has even shot tigers in India; and during a visit to Turkey took to the real original long meerschaum pipe, concerning the delights of which she wrote an elaborate essay in one of the "sporting" papers. And here I may as well mention that I myself am no longer a lover of tobacco in any shape or form. My marriage with a female smoker cured me of that vice—if it *was* a vice. Anyhow, I am positively convinced that if Honoria had *not* learned how to smoke from that Brighton school riding-master (accursed be his memory!) she would scarcely have adopted, one by one, as she did, all the other "mannish" habits which followed in the train of her first cigarette. It is all very well to tell me that Spanish women, and Russian women, and Turkish women smoke. Let them do so if they like; they are nothing to us, nor we to them; but for Heaven's sake let us ward off that vulgarity from our

sweet, fair English women, who are the pride of our country, and the prettiest and freshest to look at in the whole world! *My* wife is now an incorrigible smoker; I believe she is never seen without a cigar in her mouth; and I have unfortunately been powerless to prevent it, but I think—nay, I almost venture to *hope*—she is an exceptional sort of woman! Old and intimate friends when speaking of her to me, always say, “That *wonderful* wife of yours!” and I *know* she is wonderful; I am sure she is! I admire her respectfully—*from a distance*! I have no moral offences to charge against her; she is what the Americans call “square” in every particular. She is clever, she is brilliant, she is daring, and though she is now getting rather coarse in build, she is still handsome. She is “run after” by a certain portion of society, and adulated by a certain class of young men; (she has not yet got her way about men’s clothes, and has to conform to the “barbaric” usages of society in that respect); the eyes of the curious public are fastened upon her wherever she appears, and she enjoys that doubtful celebrity which attaches to people who are always pushing themselves to the front without any tangible claim to remarkable merit. But:—it was *I* who married her; to *my* unhappy lot it fell to test her value as a wife—her tenderness as a mother! And, as the melancholy result of that experience, I must honestly declare that, wonderful as she is, and wonderful as she



always will be, I am still regretfully compelled to acknowledge that, notwithstanding *all* her wonderfulness,—and in spite of whatever the worshipful *Daily Telegraph* may think of me,—the deplorable fact remains;—namely, that I,—her husband,—*am unable to live with her!*

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STRAY SKETCHES.



## THE GIRL GRADUATE.

Shades of fair maidens and matrons of "*ye oldene tyme!*" If you could once more come among us, and see the changes that have been wrought since your departure to the Land of the Immortals, would not your delicate cheeks flush, and your modest eyes look downward to the earth in very shame at the abasement of your sex? *Abasement?* What? In this magnificent, miserable, far-searching, much-losing nineteenth century, is there, can there, be such a thing as the abasement of womanhood? Not possible! Bear witness, oh, Platform Women, who stalk with manly stride across the boards, and give lectures on anatomy and indigestion! Bear witness, oh, triumphant Female Preachers of woman's rights, who, proudly donning the divided skirt, bid yelling defiance to the tyrant Man! Bear witness, ye strange apparitions, clad in Newmarket coats, masher collars, and deer-stalker hats, who swing your crutch-headed canes airily as you walk down Regent Street, leaving us in doubt as to whether you are men or women! Bear witness all to the progress of the age, marked gloriously by the emancipation of woman from

the bonds of slavery! Especially let us admire the educational, high-pressure system which produces the Girl Graduate, the patient, hard-working, long-suffering creature in whom all the pretty vanities and fanciful follies of the feminine temperament have been crushed, and who has crammed into her delicate, over-taxed brain so much learning that she can often surprise and outrun in the race for knowledge the most patient male student that ever consumed the midnight oil.

Greek, Latin, algebra, philosophy, logic, all these things she is supposed to have command of; she has passed her examinations with glowing honours, she has taken her degree, she has won her heart's desire, and she is, or thinks she is, on an equality with man. Often she knows little or nothing about the European languages in common use; but, no matter, she has Homer. Certes, to read the grand old Greek in his own tongue is a privilege not to be despised, but a couple of fresh roses in the Girl Graduate's cheeks would be a better poem than the Iliad. But the roses have faded and died long ago, the lustre of the eye is dimmed, the fine delicacy of the feminine wit is dulled, and while busied in endeavouring to master logic, the woman-student has lost her great gift of Nature:—*instinct*,—and she measures things by rule and plan, not by that wonderfully illogical way of reasoning, "I think so *because* I think so;" a surmise which, absurd as it may seem at first hearing,

has proved, in nine cases out of ten, to be correct, so really great are our natural instincts and presentiments, and so truly narrow is our logic.

I lately met a successful Girl Graduate, and melancholy indeed was the impression she made upon me. She had passed the examinations with the highest honours, and she was pointed out to me as a perfect marvel of knowledge, a walking encyclopædia of buried languages.

"How old is she?" I inquired.

"Just twenty-four."

Only twenty-four! I should have thought her at least forty. Pale and sallow, lanky and awkward, with straight hair cut short and put back from a high forehead on which there were already many wrinkles, she looked a plain, unhealthy woman; her shoulders had the student's stoop, and her movements were constrained and full of *gaucherie*. She was careless, almost slovenly, in her dress; but I mentally excused all this in her, feeling sure that her conversation would be brilliant enough to make amends for all her other shortcomings. But what was my surprise when I found that she had scarcely anything to say for herself. Her conversation consisted almost of monosyllables. There was some little discussion concerning music going on around us, and after the ceremony of introduction and the first few words of greeting had passed between us, I asked—

"Are you fond of music?"

The Girl Graduate looked at the carpet and nervously twiddled her thumbs. "Ye-es," she replied at last, with hesitation. "At least——that is——I don't mind it much."

"Ah, I suppose," I continued, "that you think no music equal to the rush and swing of Homer's Iliad?"

She stared vacantly at me, and seemed puzzled. Finally she gave me a pale smile and said half confidentially: "O, you mustn't think I care for Homer so much. Of course, when I 'went in' for classics, I had to read him a good deal, and so had the other girls, but I don't think any of us cared much about it. As long as we could get through it somehow and pass, the rest didn't matter."

It was my turn to be puzzled now. I looked earnestly at the sallow young lady before me, and feeling a little curious as to the result of my next question, I said—

"And what are you going to do, now that you have taken your degree?"

"Oh, I don't know; I am at home at present."

"Yes," I said; "but are you going to adopt any profession? Are you going to teach, or start a school, or practise any particular calling?"

"Oh, I don't know." (This with a deep sigh and a smothered yawn.) "You see, I am at home just now."

And no more information could I get from her. During the rest of the evening, which was a pleasant reunion of literary, musical, and artistic celebrities, she sat in a corner of the room, silent, inert, looking very tired and worn-out; and certainly, by her appearance, she seemed the least happy woman in the world. Later on, our hostess—a merry little lady, who was very well satisfied with her life of domestic cares and blisses—said to me—

“I see you have been talking to the wonderful girl-scholar. Do you know, she is one of eleven children, and her poor father and mother are working themselves almost to death to support their family. That is the eldest girl, who has just ‘graduated,’ and she cannot, or will not, help her mother in the least. She cannot mend her own clothes, she doesn’t know how to darn a stocking, and she hasn’t an idea of cookery or housekeeping—but she can read Homer!” And, with a shrewd nod, my hostess flitted away; “on hospitable thoughts intent,” leaving me to stroll through her large conservatory, where the fragrant blossoms suddenly began to talk to me in their own sweet way:—

“If I,” said a pure white rose, leaning softly against my cheek to attract my attention—“if I were to try and make myself like the strong cedar-tree outside, which has battled against a thousand hurricanes, how strange and foolish I should be. I should die in the attempt,”

for see how frail I am. Rather let me stay in my appointed place, content if I can soothe even one tired soul by the sense of my delicate odour."

"And we," murmured a cluster of violets, peeping up from their dewy nest, "if we were to try and climb as high as that great purple passion-flower above, which looks to us like a glowing star, we should sicken and fade, our stems would grow thin and weak, our blossoms poor and colourless. We never have the least wish to be other than simple violets; and yet, humble as we are, are we not loved? Are we not worn on brave hearts and carried in fair bosoms? and sometimes are we not tenderly laid, as the last most appropriate gift, in the hands of the happy dead? Need we wish for more?"

And they rustled their leaves softly as though they smiled.

"And I," said a blue Italian lily, "see how kind fate has been to me! I sought no home but the Italian fields, where my leaves drank in the colour of the sky, and my heart opened to catch the golden glory of the sun. I sought no honour, I craved no distinction, yet am I hailed by enthusiastic hearts as the emblem of Italy, and therefore the insignia of Art! Who could hold higher honours than I? And yet I sought them not."

"Sweet," sang all the blossoms together; "sweet are:

our lives and wonderful is the care bestowed upon us. Only fragile flowers are we, and yet how we are loved! Even here, how beautiful a crystal house has been built for us, we are tended every day, and we live in the joy of knowing that our lives are pleasant to all who look upon us. We asked for nothing, and yet all is ours!"

And they rustled their petals whisperingly together, and their voices that I heard, or seemed to hear in my fancy, sank gently into silence.

And I thought then how sweet might be the lives of women, the flowers of the human race, if they would be content to be flowers only, and not try to be trees, which they never can be. How many violets and lilies of womankind are spoiling their fragrance and destroying their natural grace, by the wild, senseless efforts they are making to become the equals of men. How is it possible to alter the decrees of Nature? And Nature has made woman's place in the world subordinate to that of man. I am told that the medical profession, for instance, is one that is very advisable for women to follow. It may be so. But I hope I shall be pardoned for having my doubts upon the subject. A woman's sphere is unquestionably one of home duties, and I would infinitely rather see her train herself to be a first-rate house-and-parlour-maid, than watch her career as a practising physician. At the Social Science Congress the other day, a learned man, speaking of educa-

tion *versus* health, described in the most earnest language the sorrow and dismay he experienced after visiting the colleges of Newnham and Girton.

"Such women as I saw there," he said gravely, "will never be the mothers of heroes." The history of the coming generation may be foreshadowed in that brief sentence.

Is it impossible for women to remain in the place where Nature put them? Can they not be contented with their lot, which is surely intended to be one of love and peace? There are many brave, true-hearted men who are yet romantic enough in this so practical age, as to feel to their very hearts the truth of the lover's words in Tennyson's "Maud:"

"What care I,  
Who in this stormy gulf have found a pearl,  
The counter-charm of space and hollow sky,  
And do accept my madness and would die  
To save from some slight shame one simple girl!"

But, then, she must be a "simple girl" indeed, not a would-be man in petticoats. No woman can ever hope to awaken this exquisite tenderness, this delicacy of emotion in the heart of any man, if she persists in aping his manners, his dress, his customs; if she dares and defies instead of softening and soothing him; if she attempts to measure her puny strength against his in questions of law and politics, with which she is by

Nature totally unfitted to deal, and if she *will* thrust herself into professions which will, in the long run, have the effect of totally unsexing her, and rendering her even at the best, only an object of kindly and half-pitying ridicule in the eyes of all sensible beings.

No; with all due deference to the promoters of the "Higher Education of Women," I would propose to them even a higher flight than they seem yet to have attempted—namely, that they should teach two great lessons of life, the worth of which can never be measured or valued too highly—Humility and Contentment. Roses are satisfied to be roses—why not women to be women?

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## TINY TRAMPS.

THE idea of childhood is generally associated in our minds with mirth, grace, and beauty. The fair-haired, blue-eyed treasures of proud and tender mothers, the plump, rosy little ones whose fresh young hearts know no sorrow save the sometimes ungratified longing for a new toy or new game—these are the fairy blossoms of our lives, for whom childhood really exists, and for whose dear sakes we think no sacrifice too great, no pain too wearisome, no work too heavy, so long as we can keep them in health, strength, and happiness, and ward off from their lives every shadow of suffering. And as we caress our own dimpled darlings, and listen to their merry prattling voices and their delightful laughter, we find it difficult to realize that there are other children in the world, born of the same great Mother Nature, who live on without even knowing that they *are* children, and who have “begun life” in the bitterest manner at a time when they can scarcely toddle; children to whom toys are inexplicable mysteries, and for whom the bright regions of fairyland have never been unclosed.

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These poor little waifs and strays, no matter how young they are in years, are old—one might almost say they were born old—they are familiar with the dark and crooked paths of life, and the broad, shining, golden road of love, duty, wisdom, and peace, has never been pointed out to their straying little feet.

Homes for destitute children may, and do exist, refuges and charities of all kinds are open to those who seek them, and yet, in spite of all that is done, or is doing, poor child-wanderers walk the earth, and meet us in streets and country roads, clothed in rags, their pinched faces begrimed with dirt and tears, and their tiny voices attuned to the beggar's whine, while too often, alas! their young hearts are already withered by the corroding influences of deceit and cunning.

The other day one of these tiny tramps came to my door, and implored in piteous accents for a crust of bread. He was a pretty little fellow of some seven or eight years old, and his blue eyes looked bright with innocence and trust. His tiny naked feet were cracked and sore, and covered with mud, and his clothes were in so dirty and ragged a condition that it seemed a miracle how they could hang together at all. Through the large holes in these wretched garments, however, might be seen many pretty glimpses of soft pink and white skin, and his face was as plump, and fair, and rosy as the fondest mother could desire it to be.

Nevertheless, he assured me in the most mournful manner that he was very cold and hungry, and that his feet were so very sore he could scarcely stand; so, without more ado, we took him into the kitchen, bathed his feet for him in refreshing warm water, and provided him with a warm pair of stockings and a strong pair of boots. Then we put him on a chair by the fire, and feasted him with a large bowl of barley-broth, which he appeared to enjoy exceedingly. A piece of cake was then given to him as a concluding relish, and when he had quite finished his meal, I asked him where he was going.

My small tramp screwed his knuckles into his eyes, and mournfully replied, "Home."

"Where is home?" I inquired.

"With mother."

"And where does mother live?"

"Please, 'm, she lives on the road."

"Lives on the road!" I exclaimed, "but where does she sleep?"

"On the road, 'm, please, 'm."

I looked at the small waif in silence. He met my glance with a weird upraising of his eyes and eyebrows, which gave him an expression that was half-plaintive, half-cunning.

"What road does she live on?" I asked.

"Please, 'm, any road as comes 'andy."

I sighed involuntarily. He was such a pretty child; and what a life seemed in store for him!

"What does your mother do?" I continued.

"Please, 'm, she sells *buttings*."

"Buttings?"

"Yes, 'm, buttings, an' 'ooks an' 'ise."

Buttons, and hooks and eyes. I knew the kind of woman she must be—bold, slovenly, and dirty, most likely, wearing a flashy bonnet on one side of her head, and brass rings on her fingers. A woman with a carneying voice, with which she insinuated herself into the good graces of servants, and persuaded them to purchase her trumpery goods.

"Have you a father?" I asked.

"Yes, 'm. He gits drunk, 'm."

Dismissing the idea of the father at once, I continued my catechising.

"Why doesn't your mother send you to school?"

"I dunno, 'm." Here the small knuckles were screwed into the eyes more violently than ever.

"Where is your mother now?"

"I dunno, 'm."

"Well then, how are you going to find her?"

"I dunno, 'm. I kin try."

"Do you know where to try?"

"Yes, 'm. I knows her pub."

"Do you mean the public-house?"

"Yes, 'm, please, 'm." And as if the recollection of the "pub" had suddenly aroused him to action, the little forlorn wanderer slipped off his chair by the fire, and prepared to start. I fastened an old warm cloth jacket round him, and turning his little rosy face up that I might survey it closely, I said—

"Now, suppose you cannot find your mother, will you come back here? I'll take care of you till we can find her for you, and you shall have some more cake. Do you understand?"

"Yes, 'm."

"Stop a minute," I said; and seizing a scrap of paper, I hastily wrote the words—"Should you wish this child taken care of, put to school, and brought up to earn an honest livelihood, you can call at this house any day during the next three weeks;" and adding my name and address, I sealed the paper carefully. Then putting it in the pocket of the jacket I had just given him, I again addressed my small tramp—

"Will you give that letter to your mother when you find her?"

He looked decidedly astonished, and somewhat doubtful about the propriety of acceding to this request; but after a moment of consideration, he gave me his invariable reply—

"Yes, 'm, please, 'm."

Raising the child in my arms, I kissed his rosy in-

telligent face, my heart swelling with pity for his hard fate, and then I led him to the front door. He made a kind of attempt at a salute, by pulling one of his chestnut curls into his eyes, and then scrambled down the steps and ran away, while I rushed to my window, which commands an entire view of the street, and watched him. He looked round now and then to see if any one were near, and finding the road pretty well deserted, he finally seated himself on a doorstep, and I was able to observe the whole of his proceedings, which filled me with the greatest surprise and dismay.

The first thing he did was to take off the boots and stockings with which he had been provided, and to tie them in a bunch together. He then deliberately walked into a heap of the thickest black mud he could find, and tramped and splashed about therein till the feet, which had been so nicely washed, were as black and grimy as they could well be. This done, he took off the warm jacket, and rolling it up in as small a bundle as he could manage to make, he tucked it under his arm, then giving himself two or three dexterous shakes which had the effect of displaying the large holes in his own tattered garments to the best advantage, he uttered a sort of wild whoop or yell and scampering up the street as fast as he could go, he disappeared from my sight. I knew his destination as well as if it had been told to me then and there. He was going to convert

that jacket and those boots and stockings into money at the nearest old-clothes shop, and then he would no doubt hasten to his mother's "pub," and detail to her his successful morning's adventure. She would take the money he had obtained for the clothes, and, perhaps, give the child twopence for himself as reward for his smartness and there would be an end, while certainly the letter I had prepared would never be thought of or even discovered unless by some old Jew salesman, who would not comprehend its meaning. Yet could I blame the poor little tramp for his behaviour? No, indeed, I only pitied the unfortunate child more than ever.

Trained to deceive as thoroughly as we train our children to speak the truth, could anything else have been reasonably expected of him? It would have been a real matter for surprise had he acted differently. Still, I was foolish enough to feel somewhat disappointed, for the boy's face had attracted me. It is curious, too, to observe how very many attractive child-faces there are among the little vagrants of the London streets. Children with beautiful eyes and hair—children whose flesh is a perfect marvel of softness and fair delicacy, in spite of the dirt that grimes them from top to toe—and children whose limbs are so gracefully and finely formed, and whose whole manner and bearing are so indescribably lofty, that one would almost deem them to have been born in the purple. An excellent type of the tramp

aristocracy came to me one morning in the shape of an Italian boy of about ten or eleven years of age, who strolled under my window, twanging prettily enough the chords of a much-used, far-travelled, but still sweet-toned, mandoline. I have always an extra soft heart for these straying minstrels from my own sunny land of song and I immediately called him, and entered into conversation with him. He told me he had travelled far and earned little, and that he seldom had enough to eat, but he was merry. "Oh, yes," he said, smiling his bright southern smile, "he was always hopeful and light-hearted."

Some peculiarity in his accent impelled me to ask him if he were not from Lombardy, and never shall I forget the superb gesture of head and the proud flash of his eyes, as he drew himself up, and replied, with dignity, "No, signorina, *io son Romano*" ("I am a Roman").

If he had declared himself an emperor, he could not have asserted himself with more dignity. Many a languid dandy, dawdling through the saloons of fashion, might have envied his grace of figure and princely bearing.

There was a very interesting account once in the *Telegraph*, concerning two baby tramps known as "Sally and her Bloke." Sally was eight, and her boy companion, the "Bloke," was nine. No matter how great the distances each had to traverse during the day in

obedience to the will of the tyrannical parents or masters who employed them to beg, or sell matches in the streets, as surely as the evening fell these two mites were always found together. Some irresistible attraction, some inexplicable sympathy, drew them together, and the poor little things entertained for each other so harmless, and withal so true, an affection, that even the coarse companions with whom their lot was cast were touched by their behaviour, and spoke with rough good-nature akin to respect of "Sally and her Bloke," and forbore to interfere with their pretty and pathetic little romance. I wondered at the time if anything would be done for this forlorn little couple, but the matter seems to have died out in mere sentiment, and "Sally and her Bloke" will no doubt be left to grow up as such children do grow up—in vice and misery.

A great step in advance has been made since the great English author, Charles Mackay, wrote his famous poem, "The Souls of the Children," which so powerfully impressed the late Prince Consort that he had thousands of copies printed at his own personal expense, and circulated them freely all over the land. This poem helped largely to influence the minds of English philanthropists and statesmen in favour of universal popular education; but, surely, there yet remains much to be done! True, the question may be justly asked, can anything more be done? It is indeed terrible to think that

we must always be doomed to see sorrow, ignorance, and vice imprinted on the tender, flower-like faces of the very young, and that there must always be, in spite of the efforts of the wisest and best men, a large majority of babes and children for whom there is and can be no hope of good. Must there be a perpetual sacrifice of the innocents to the god of all evil? One of the saddest sights to me, among all the sad sights of London, are the neglected children who have somehow eluded the kindly-meant, though occasionally stern, grasp of the Government officials, and who have literally nothing to hope for, nothing to render their lives of value to the nation; and who, as far as their wretched parents are concerned, might be better out of the world than in it. The streets swarm with such helpless little ones, and yet it seems impossible to do more than is being done every day. English men and women have tender hearts full of pitiful gentleness for the helplessness of infancy, and the charities that are instituted for poor and neglected children, are, I believe, most generously supported; yet amid such a mass of distress and evil, how futile seems all the best work of statesmen and philosophers! We must, however, continue to hope for better times, when every child that is born into the land may be recognized as the child of the Government no less than of its parents, and may be brought to realize its own responsible position and value as a servant of the ~~state~~.

This was the condition of things in Sparta, and, though the Spartans carried their ideas rather too far, still it must be admitted that their system had its foundation in very excellent common sense. Whatever mistakes and shortcomings Lycurgus may have had to answer for, it is certain that he never would have tolerated baby tramps.

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## A WORD ABOUT "OUIDA".

THERE are a large number of self-styled "superior" people in the literary world who make it a sort of rule to treat with vague laughter and somewhat unintelligent contempt the novels of the gifted Madame de la Ramé, known to the reading public as "Ouida". Men, particularly, profess to be vastly amused with the heroes she depicts; the splendid "muscular" types of masculine beauty, the wondrous individuals who "drench" their beards and moustaches with perfume, smoke scented cigars and run through millions of money in no time; and it may readily be admitted that numerous excrescences in the shape of over-floridness, unnecessary exaggeration of character and sensuousness of suggestion, do, to a great extent, spoil works that would, but for these defects, take their place in the highest rank of modern literature.

But, when all is said and done, the fact remains, that "Ouida" is a woman of *genius*. Not Talent, merely, but Genius. In the opinion of many judges, this genius may be considered as a flower growing in a

perfect wilderness of brambles and rough fern, yet the flower is there all the same, and the unprejudiced eye will at once discover it. Nothing is so easy as to find fault; everyone can do that, from the little penny-a-liner up to the full-blown, "slashing" swash-buckler critic for the literary Reviews; yet, to read books in the mere spirit of fault-finding, is, I humbly venture to assert, to read them wrongly. To take up a novel, poem or essay with the mental determination to look for its imperfections is the greatest mistake in the world. Imperfections can be found in all the masterpieces of Literature, from Homer and Catullus downwards. We can, if we so choose, sit on our three-legged stool of criticism and sneer at all the gods. Homer is too lengthy—we are bored with his shipping list. Plato is too didactic. Dante and Byron are too personal; they insist on their own private wrongs too flagrantly. Keats is too, too sweet; his honey cloyes our lips! Shelley is obscure and full of moon-struck misty vagaries. And Shakespeare—ah! we pause at Shakespeare. What shall we say of him? Well, if we are of the Donelly-ass persuasion, we can bray forth our belief that he was Bacon; if we belong to Mrs. Grundy's school, we can whisper that in certain of his allusions he is decidedly improper! And so with everything and everybody. And because a few reviewers jest lightly, and more or less sneeringly at the "Ouida" social types, we

are apt to pass on the sneer and repeat the jest without giving the author whom we condemn the fair chance of our own unbiassed examination. Yet reviewers, though they pose as Oracles, are, after all, only men; and difficult as it may be to believe a fact so bare of chivalry it is pretty certain that many a male author is ungallantly jealous of a woman's brain that proves in any respect sharper, quicker and more subtle than his own. Hence we find most professional men-critics somewhat contemptuous and intolerant of women's literary attainments (*vide* the largest half of the masculine criticism bestowed on the more highly distinguished female authors, such as Mrs. Barrett Browning, George Eliot, Georges Sand and others of that calibre); they are more willing to give the helping word of praise to any member of their own sex who makes the mildest and most random "hit" of one season; especially if such an individual happens to have taken club-shares in the "Great Firm of Perpetual Log-Rolling and Press-Favour Limited," which does such excellent business for its supporters. *Women*-reviewers are comparatively few, and when they do take to the reviewing line of business, it is very frequently after they have failed as novelists. Now, to expect feminine non-success to applaud feminine triumph would surely be like asking women to become full-fledged angels at once, without giving them time to grow their wings! As for ~~xxx~~

selves, who read, or pretend to read, the books we so glibly chatter about, we too often "skip" through novels; we get a crude idea of the story without for one instant taking the trouble to disentangle the thread of thought on which it is hung. In the case, however, of absolute, turgid incoherent incomprehensibility, such as is found in Mr. George Meredith's fictionary efforts, and Browning's verse, we are so thoroughly in the dark that a reckless, maddened few of us will actually start "societies" to elucidate the mysteries wherewith we, being only endowed with a little common-sense, cannot sanely and comfortably grapple. True, the "societies" only muddle our brains a trifle more by their explanatory "systems," but then it is a relief to think we can at least shift the burden of trying to understand the non-understandable on somebody else's shoulders, even though that somebody else should, in the end, prove to be as incorrigibly stupid as we are!

Now "Ouida" is not a darkly sybilline writer. No one need puzzle over her utterances, for these are in many respects almost *too* plain for the grimly pious satisfaction of good Mother Grundy! Moreover, no excuse whatever can be found for the perverted view of life this gifted author insists on holding up to the public eye as the *only* prospect possible on our already too dark and sin-clouded human horizon. Bad as society may be, we like to think that there is good lurking

somewhere beneath its evil scum; bereft of beauty and desolate as an age of cynicism and gold-gathering selfishness always is, we like to hope that it may prove a mere passing storm-cloud, clearing the sky, perchance, for brighter and more wholesome weather. Why, therefore, "Ouida's" characters of good women should, as a rule, be foolish, and come to a miserably undeserved end, while her characters of courtesans and *cocottes* should nearly always be triumphant, is a question that only "Ouida" herself can answer. Recognizing as I do, the force of her inspiration, it is a matter of both wonder and regret to me that her brilliant pen has so often been used for the depicting of social enormities and moral sores; but while deploring the fact I still assert: Genius, Genius—not mere talent—is in this woman. And it is my habit to honour Genius, as a lightning-message from the gods, where-ever and however it flashes across my path. I have never met Madame de la Ramé, and certain well-intentioned persons have assured me that should I ever venture into her presence, I should probably meet with a rough reception, "as," say the gossips, "she hates her own sex." This may be, or it may not; but as I never pin my faith on rumour, I am inclined to give "Ouida" the benefit of the doubt. At all events, no *brusquerie* on her part would alter or pervert in the least the current of a certain homage on mine. I cannot, for example, withhold my honest ad-

miration from the woman who wrote the following passage on the world's greatest poet, Shakespeare. It is taken from the fine story of "Ariadnê":—

"Can you read Shakespeare? You think Dante greater. Of course you do, being an Italian. But you are wrong. Dante never got out of his own narrow world. He filled the great blank of the Hereafter with his own spites and despites. He marred his finest verse with false imagery to rail at a foe or flaunt a polemic. His Eternity was only a mill-pond in which he should be able to drown the dogs he hated. A great man!—oh, yes!—but never by a league near Shakespeare. Sympathy is the hall-mark of the poet. Genius should be wide as the heavens and deep as the sea in infinite comprehension. To understand intuitively—that is the breath of its life. Whose understanding was ever as boundless as Shakespeare's? From the woes of the mind diseased, to the coy joys of the yielding virgin; from the ambitions of the king and the conqueror, to the clumsy glee of the clown and the milkmaid; from the highest heights of human life to the lowest follies of it—he comprehended all. That is the wonder of Shakespeare. No other writer was ever so miraculously impersonal. And if one thinks of his manner of life it is the more utterly surprising. With everything in his birth, in his career, in his temper, to make him cynic and revolutionist, he has never a taint of either pes-

simism or revolt. For Shakespeare to have to bow, as a mere mime in Leicester's house!—it would have given any other man the gall of a thousand Marats. With that divinity in him, to sit content under the mulberry trees, and see the Squires Lucy ride by in state,—one would say it would have poisoned the very soul of St. John himself. Yet never a drop of spleen or envy came in him; he had only a witty smile at false dignities and a matchless universality of compassion that pitied the tyrant as well as the serf, and the loneliness of royalty as well as the loneliness of poverty. That is where Shakespeare is unapproachable. He is as absolutely impartial as a Greek Chorus. And thinking of the manner of his life, it is marvellous that it should have bent him to no bias, warped him to no prejudice. If it were the impartiality of coldness, it would be easy to imitate; but it is the impartiality of sympathy, boundless and generous as the sun which shines upon the 'meanest thing that lives, as liberally as on the summer rose!' That is why Shakespeare is as far higher from Dante, as one of Dante's angels from the earth."

Now, the men-critics, who, as soon as a novel of "Ouida's" comes in for review, murmur, "Ouida! oh, she's always good game!" and scratch off at once half a column of "smart" gibing, would be cleverer than they are ever likely to be, if they could write such a

passage of pure, fluent, eloquent English as this; nay, if a man instead of a woman *had* written it, he might (and would!) be proud. Men are far more conceited concerning their literary efforts, than women. And though I do not wish to claim for "Ouida" any position that she is not, in the opinion of more experienced literary judges, entitled to possess, I *do* claim for her simple justice. Justice my lords and gentlemen! — pause and consider, before falling foul of "Chandos" and his exaggerated masculine beauty, whether there is not an incisive truth, firmness and fineness of delineation in the character of Chandos's half-brother "John Trevenna," the wily, cruel, cunning, pitiless creature whose actions all spring from self-interest and the inherited thirst of vengeance? You will search in vain through the pretty stories of William Black, the wearyful common-places of W. D. Howells, or any loftily-named "Saga" of Hall Caine's for so powerfully drawn a *human* type as this "Trevenna," who *lives* in the printed page, as absolutely, as breathingly, as any one of Balzac's heroes. Turn to "Tricotrin", and if you are thoroughly matter-of-fact, pass over all the idealistic wanderings of the self-disinherited man; "skip" his concealed, but infinitely tender and romantic passion for the spoilt child "Viva"; but read—every word of it mind!—read the scene with the wreckers on the coast of Spain. If such a passage as that had been found in one of Walter

Scott's or Dickens's novels, it would have been quoted in every "Elegant Extract" book and "Penny Reader" in the kingdom. There is certainly no *living* novelist in whose works can be found a more thrilling, nobly-drawn word-picture of storm, darkness and terror. Again, take the story of "In Maremma." It is improbable, you say? So is "She" over which the public went mad some short time since. But "In Maremma" is a perfect Love-Poem in prose; and "She", with every respect for its author's imaginative power of creating flesh-creeping horrors, is very, very far from being in the least poetical. Yet Love and Poetry *exist*; they are rare but not impossible things, thank Heaven!—while the idea of "She" is entirely out of all possibility. Hence "Ouida" deals with a beautiful *fact*, while Mr. Rider Haggard deals with a ghastly *fancy*; result,—a blatant burst of enthusiasm for the ghastly fancy—a smile, sneer, and doubtful shrug at the beautiful fact. One cannot, of course, pretend to account for the tastes of reviewers—but certain it is that the pitiful love of poor "Musa" the heroine of "In Maremma", is to the full as touching and pathetic as any of Boccaccio's far-famed stories, and as probable in all points as any of the legends of poetic love and passion in all ages, while the style in which it is written is exquisite, delicate and scholarly to a degree, unsurpassed by any modern *male* or female writer of to-day's fiction.

It is the fashion just now among certain critics to rave over the performances of Robert Louis Stevenson whose "Master of Ballantrae" has in some quarters been called a "classic". If it is "classical" to be hopelessly dull, then I agree with this verdict, but I venture to doubt whether the Press-eulogised author thereof, has any touch of the perceptive delicacy needed to carve out for us such a finished cameo-study as Ouida's "Umiltà". This is a short story which few people seem to know, yet it is quite perfect of its kind. Not a word too much—not an exaggeration—not a single blot of over-colouring; pathetic, yet simple as a mountain melody—a mere village incident raised to the dignity of a poem by the matchless way in which it is treated. The portrait of the fair, pure, proud, unjustly-accused "Umiltà" stands out like a white statue in full sunlight, a flawless thing and beautiful; and the same hand that called it into being wrote "Moths"! Yes, I know! but neither I nor anyone else can presume to account for the changing moods and phases of the writing temperament. Why did Byron write "Don Juan"? Why did Shelley touch the repulsive subject of the "Cenci"? An author endowed with the restless Protean-like quality of genius cannot be always at the same dead level of placable equanimity. Talent, like that of Mr. Andrew Lang, who, sitting on his little bibliographic dust-heap, discourses pipingly on "Was Jehovah a stone Fetish?"

is, we know, at the beck and call of every subject on which it is paid to write; but Genius is wilful, often exceedingly irritating in its capricious changes of humour, and never exactly what the world would have it be. Thought, like Time, has its sweet and bitter seasons. In the happiest hours of her imagination I can imagine "Ouida" writing such stories as "Umiltà", or that most touching of all child-romances "Moufflou", which can be read many times yet never without a sense of tears in the throat, or "The Dog of Flanders", "Two Little Wooden Shoes", or that *whitest* of all her works, if I may use such a term, "Wanda". But all hours are not happy ones, and when bitterness creeps into some natures, why, naturally, bitterness will *out*. And random, reckless, and sometimes pointless though her shafts may be, because of the sheer haste with which she flings them, there is often a terrible sting of truth in "Ouida's" assertions. Take the following examples:—

"A cruel story runs on wheels, *and every hand oils the wheels as they run.*"

"Some people hold that a life that rises from obscurity to triumph should look back in grateful obligation to *those who, when it was in obscurity, did their best to keep it there!*"

"Popularity has been defined as the privilege of being cheered by the kind of people you would never allow to bow to you. Fame may be said to be the

privilege of being slandered at once by the people who *do* bow to you, as well as by the people who do *not!*”

“Perhaps nobody can comprehend how utterly *un-educated* it is possible to be, who has not lived entirely with the *educated classes!*”

There is no faltering feminine weakness in these expressions; they are as pointed, as ruthless, as witty, as any sayings of Rochefoucauld. A Man might have written them —ye gods! think of it—the Nobler Creature might have penned such lines and smiled complacently at his own cleverness afterwards!

Let it not be imagined that I, or any of us for that matter, seek to defend “Ouida’s” system of morals as set forth in her books. Not at all. Bad morals are bad everywhere, whether served up to us at breakfast in our morning-paper accounts of the latest divorce case, or in the widely-discussed novels of Tolstoi and Emil Zola, or in the “Poems and Ballads” of Swinburne, or in the amazingly absurd social plays of Ibsen. The popularity of “As in a Looking Glass” does not make the moral of that book any better, while, unlike “Ouida’s” productions, it has not a saving gleam of poetic treatment about it to redeem its quality. Cannot the public discriminate aright? What is it they really admire? “Sandford and Merton”? “The Wide Wide World”? “Goody Two-Shoes”? This is not apparent in the spirit of the time. Myself, I think the wildest of “Ouida’s”

flights into romance, "Idalia"—which we, being prosy folk, must acknowledge as too highly exaggerated—is still far more wholesome and preferable to the repulsive suggestiveness of the work entitled "A Romance of the Nineteenth Century", written by a *man*, distinguished and clever enough to have known what he was about when writing it. "Ouida" has never sinned to such a nauseous extent of mind-pollution as *that*. Her faults are those of reckless impulse and hurry of writing; being a woman, she has all that warmth and often mistaken *ardour of the pen* which a man, unless he be very young, very gifted, and very enthusiastic, generally lacks. Taking up her descriptive palette, she mixes her brilliant colours too rapidly, and the male beings she draws, beautiful as gods and muscular as Homer's sinewy warriors, become the laughing-stock of men generally; especially of the ugly and wizened ones who compose the majority! Her lovely women are *too* lovely, and invariably start a feeling of discontent in those members of the fair sex who are unable to spend a fortune on gowns. Love is the chief *motif* of all her novels; and love such as she depicts, arising mainly from the attraction of sex to sex is, *of course*, impossible and absurd and—*wicked*! It does not exist, in fact! We love and marry because it is highly respectable so to do, especially where there is plenty of money to live upon. The "strong bent of Nature", as Emerson hath it, the "in-

mortal hilarity", the "rose of joy"—no! really, really! this will not do, though Emerson declares it will; it is wrong, quite wrong! The nineteenth century will not permit us to *love* any more; we are requested to *scheme* instead. And when our scheming is successful, and we are once married and established in a comfortable social position, we can have what some Theosophists call "soul-affinities". This is very nice and very romantic, very "moral" and very pretty;—and in such an exalted state of virtue we naturally reject the "Ouida" novels with scorn, especially that bitter, biting one called "Friendship"!

But though we need not praise the "Ouida" morals, or endorse the "Ouida" exaggerations, we must, if we are not blind, deaf and obstinate, admire the "Ouida" eloquence. There is no living author who has the same rush, fire and beauty of language; we are bound to admit this if we wish to be just. There are plenty of authors, though, who think it no shame to steal whole passages from her books, and transplant them bodily word for word into their own productions, and in the work of one third-rate lady novelist whom I will not name, I have discovered more than twenty prose gems taken sentence for sentence out of "Ouida" without a shadow of difference! However, it is a strange but true fact, that the deliberate robber of other people's ideas never secures the fame he or she attempts to steal.

Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but it is nearly always suicide to the imitator. The original conception triumphs in the end; it remains, while its feeble *replicas* perish; and the most painstaking labour can never compass even a paraphrase of one line of sheer *inspiration*. This gift of *inspiration* which cannot be bought, or sold, or taught, "Ouida" possesses, not in a small, but in a very large and overflowing degree. Her faults, judged by the strictest rules of criticism, may be manifold, but it should always be remembered that she is a writer of *romance*, and that she deals with the supposed romantic side of social life. One cannot but think her recent article on Shelley a mistake; yet it is only the result of her unbridled enthusiasm for the *poet*, that makes her write such "wild and whirling" words as that a "hundred thousand" girls might esteem themselves happy to be sacrificed as a holocaust to Shelley's passion—"hundred thousand" being in this instance a mere *façon de parler*. It is the reckless expression of impulse, and, rash as it may be, is more commendable than the cold-blooded casuistry of Mrs. Mona Caird, who has recently made what seems like a deliberate and dispassionate magazine-appeal for universal polygamy! Probably the worst that can be said for "Ouida" is that she is a *romancer*, and an answer to that accusation is best given in her own eloquent way:

"When the soldier dies at his post unhonoured and

unpitied, and out of sheer duty, is that *unreal*, because it is noble? When the sister of charity hides her youth under a grey shroud and gives up her whole life to woe and solitude, is that *unreal* because it is wonderful? A man paints a spluttering candle, a greasy cloth, a mouldy cheese, a pewter can, 'how *real*!' the people say. If he paints the spirituality of dawn, the light of the summer sea, the flame of arctic nights, of tropic woods, they are called *unreal*, though they exist no less than the candle and the cloth, the cheese, and the can. All that is heroic, all that is sublime, impersonal or glorious, is now derided as *unreal*. It is a dreary creed; it will make a dreary world. Is not my Venetian glass with its hues of opal as *real* every whit as your pot of pewter? Yet the time is coming when everyone, morally and mentally at least, will be allowed no other than a pewter pot to drink out of under pain of being 'writ down an ass.' It is a dreary prospect!"

True, oh, "Ouida"! Pitifully, deplorably true! Our age is one of Prose and Positivism; we take Deity for an Ape, and Andrew Lang as its prophet!

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## PATRONS OF ART.

"Social influence, my dear—social influence! That is what you want," says the fashionable Mrs. Ponsonby Tomkins, eyeing with gracious condescension the young *cantatrice* who has brought her a letter of introduction from one of the first professors in Italy. "You shall come and sing at one of my 'at homes' for—for *nothing*—you understand?—and you will meet people; that is all you require."

"Push, push, my dear fellow," says my Lord Tom-Noddy, languidly staring through his eye-glass at an easel on which stands a painting, rich in colour and alive with genius, the work of a shabby, hungry-looking man, who, brush in hand, gazes hopefully at his aristocratic "swell" visitor, whom he half expects (poor fellow!) will be his best friend and benefactor. "Don't paint this kind of thing at all. Sunset, sea, clouds, mountains—all very nice—very good form. But overdone. Too many pictures of sunset, sea, clouds, mountains. I'll tell you what; you shall paint Lady Tom-Noddy's portrait for—for *nothing*, of course, and I'll get H. R. H.

to notice it. Then you'll be the rage—and so will Lady Tom-Noddy!"

"Very nice, very nice indeed!" murmurs the successful stage-manager approvingly to the unknown pretty woman full of nervous force and dramatic energy, who has come to plead for work at his theatre. "Very promising. But"—and he scratches his head perplexedly—"I really *don't* think—no, I really *don't* think we have a vacancy. And if we had—you see, you have no influence to back you up. You couldn't *pose* for a little in society as a professional beauty, could you? No money? Ah!—and I suppose you couldn't get credit? That makes it very difficult. But if you *could* manage the beauty dodge, and then come on afterwards to us, we might try you. You see it really doesn't matter to us whether you act well or ill; there's only one theatre in London that goes in for the *art* of the thing at all, and that's the Lyceum. We don't pretend to compete with Henry Irving. We say: 'Will a woman go down with the public, or won't she?' That's the test. Look at Mrs. Tom Tiddler. She can't act a bit; but she draws, and she'll draw more by-and-by. You can act, evidently; but that's no use—not a bit."

"Poetry!—verse! Publish at our own risk! My dear sir, you must be dreaming!" gasps the astonished eminent publisher, looking almost reproachfully at the noble head

and flashing eyes of the new author who has just called upon him. "If we brought this book out we should have to charge you with all the expenses, including advertising; it would probably cost you some fifty or sixty pounds, and be a dead failure into the bargain. Certainly, I admit the poems are fine—exceptionally so—but what does that matter? You might be a second Shakespeare; it wouldn't affect us a bit. Besides, the critics are always 'down' on verse; it's their great fun. Poetry doesn't pay nowadays; nobody wants it. Of course, if you had plenty of money to throw away it might be a different matter, but you say you've got none. In that case—dear me!"—here he glances anxiously at his watch—"I haven't another moment to spare. Pray excuse me! Sorry I can't meet your wishes. *Good morning.*" And the eminent publisher hurries into his private den, leaving the poet to pocket his manuscript and wend his way sorrowfully homewards, thinking, perchance: "Where are the encouragers of Art in these days?"

True, where are they? Are Mrs. Ponsonby Tomkins and my Lord Tom-Noddy types of those whose privilege it is to have much of this world's goods given to them, and whose duty it therefore is to assist those upon whom Fortune frowns, but for whom Art smiles? Oh, my lords and ladies! artists have very little reason to be grateful to you. They know too well the limits of your generosity.

You will subscribe large sums to charities where your names can be printed in newspapers and circulars as having given so much, but for the struggling genius for whom help, if offered at all, must be offered with rare delicacy and tact, you have nothing but what you call "social influence". Now, what are these high-sounding words, "social influence"? What do they mean to the gifted musician, for instance? Simply that he is expected to shew off his particular talent at all the "at homes" he is invited to. Generally no payment at all is offered, or if it be, the sum is so slight that he is almost ashamed to take it; and at these afternoon or evening assemblies he "meets people". Oh, indeed! What people? A heterogeneous crowd of persons among whom are amateur reciters, ballad singers, thought readers, and other half-and-half notabilities, all supposed to be able to "do something" (otherwise they would not be invited) and all inclined to look coldly upon any new-comer, especially if that new-comer possesses real genius. Then the "at home" audience—if one can call such frivolous butterflies of fashion an audience at all—what is it? Mostly composed of women, who are nearly all the time engaged in discussing one another's dress and appearance, and who pay no attention whatever to the music. This kind of thing, repeated over and over again throughout the London season, is supposed to be "social influence"; and in the case of a lady *artiste* it

is a positive drag upon her, and by no means an aid to her career. Singer or *pianiste*, the "at home" dodge is played upon her; and to go out to fashionable houses she must perforce dress well. To dress well she must have money; but of this Mrs. Ponsonby Tomkins and her crew take no thought. They think it her duty to appear in elegant toilette, and to play or sing her best. For what?—Social influence. Say rather social fraud! Earnest, helpful influence—sincerely used on behalf of struggling, deserving artists—is little known in England, and when it is attempted, it is too often woefully misapplied.

In one of the most influential houses in London, a teacher of singing, who learned all he knows from a lady-vocalist, famous in her day, whom he deceived and afterwards abandoned—a modern Silenus of the worst type—is received as the "most trusted" friend of the family; in another, a so-called "composer", whose "drawing-room songs" are the feeblest among feeble inanities, is petted, lionized, and made as much of as if he were a second Chopin, and, in his own heart, thinks himself vastly superior to the Polish master. Here, a daub, miscalled a picture, sells for five hundred guineas, because the dauber, miscalled artist, happens to be an affable man who can give excellent dinners and stylish parties; there, a trashy set of verses is published in one of the leading magazines of the

day, and why? Because its author is a lord. What hope, then, is there for the few hard-working people whose very life—body and soul—is in their art, and who cannot help shewing how they despise the Brummagen goods that are accepted in place of sterling gold and silver? For this is the age of Sham:—sham jewels, sham lace, sham complexions, sham figures; and worse than these merely outward things, sham sentiment, sham love, sham benevolence, sham patriotism, sham politics, sham all—save one thing—the Love of Money. There's no sham about that! In that we are horribly, frightfully in earnest, with the selfish, devilish, earnestness of professional gamblers, who behold with a cynical smile the ruin of others, themselves unmoved. Everything gives way before this chief vice and crowning passion; a trifling difference about money matters will separate old friends, will part betrothed lovers, will sow bitter dissension between husband and wife, will make brothers enemies, and will cause father and son to distrust and suspect each other's intentions.

But in matters of art is it not a question of money also? Naturally, every artist seeks some slight reward for his work; surely "the labourer is worthy of his hire." But the unthinking "patrons" of art too often pay the "hire" to the wrong persons—to the charlatans and impostors who are to be found in every profession, from the painting of Christmas and birthday cards up

to the writing of bad rhymes, which somehow or other, find their way into seemingly respectable magazines, and who are crowding obstructions in the path of really gifted men, and by the time the world holds out the tardy wreath of honour to the long-neglected genius whom it at last acknowledges, it is generally too late. The tired hero-soul has mutely accepted its crucifixion, and turns with languor and loathing from the vinegar and gall of men's reluctant praise; it looks away, beyond, upward, to those far, vast regions where earth is accounted less than a pin's point of dew on the leaf of a flower. Such has been, such is, and such will be in nine cases out of ten, the fate of genius in all its forms. "But, dear me!" says Society pettishly, "What else can be expected? We *always* neglect our geniuses; besides, we really prefer people who are only just a little bit talented; geniuses—real geniuses—are such queer creatures! One is never quite sure what to say to them."

Very true, dear Society! I readily admit it. You don't in the least know how to meet a superior intelligence; your little hypocrisies are then no use to you; your airs and graces are practised in vain; in short, you feel mean, and uncomfortably aware of your own deficiencies! Yes, I know! I quite understand! But while I sympathize most keenly in the very natural desire you have not to see your ignorance exposed by

the trenchant truthfulness of an unsuspected Socrates, or the sparkling wit of an unrecognized Molière, I do not hesitate to cry "Shame!" on a certain portion of your brilliant ranks, namely, that portion composed of the strictly "fashionable" ladies with plenty of money, who pretend to "patronize" the hard-working *artistes* of the musical profession. I will cite here one or two instances that have come under my own personal observation; one of a young lady, well-born, highly educated, ravishingly pretty, and possessing extraordinary musical genius, who called the other day on a sort of Mrs. Gorgious Midas woman, taking with her a warm letter of introduction from one of Mrs. Midas's own intimate friends. Mrs. Gorgious was dressing when the young lady arrived, and contented herself with sending a message by her servant to the effect that she was "engaged," but "would keep the artist's name and address;" just as if she were a milliner, a dressmaker, or a cleaner and trimmer of ladies' false hair, instead of being what she is—a brilliant musician and perfect *grande dame* in the highest sense of those expressive French words. Another case is as follows:—At an afternoon assembly, held in one of the best houses in town, where the host and hostess are considered persons of some importance, being connected with Her Majesty's Household, a new Italian singer, a beautiful woman with glorious dark eyes, was asked (and the

asking sounded more like a command) to sing. With a sunny smile of assent she sang—only a poet could express the deliciousness, beauty and fulness of her splendid voice, the heart and passion with which she gave it utterance. The people in the room listened open-mouthed and staring—she ceased,—they turned to resume their interrupted chatter, making a few remarks such as these: “Good voice?” “Ya-as. Sings very well.” “Who is she?” “Oh, no one of importance—quite unknown,” &c., while the hostess walked stiffly up to her unpaid vocalist, said “Thank you; charmed, I’m sure!” and afterwards sang, or rather shrieked forth, a song herself, all out of tune, for which she was wildly applauded by her own special toadies and flatterers. By-and-by every one filed in to tea, which was laid out in an adjoining apartment. No man offered his arm to the Italian cantatrice—she followed the crowd timidly and all alone. The titled mistress of the house forgot to hand her a cup of tea, and seeing her sitting thus sorrowfully apart, I ventured to give her mine, which had just been condescendingly bestowed on me by one of the superior sex with a glass in his eye and a black moustache, who evidently imagined himself just a trifle better-looking than the god Apollo. She accepted the poor refreshment with that sweet, sudden smile which is the peculiar charm of some Italian faces, and a “Grazie, signora!” as softly

musical as the *pianissimo* of her own vocalization, and for some ten or fifteen minutes we conversed together. But every one else in the room seemed to have forgotten her presence, and yet, you may be sure, the hostess considered herself as a "patron" of the new *artiste* who naturally would have to be grateful for the "social influence" thus exerted.

A young composer told me a little experience of his own the other day. He was invited to the house of a Mrs. Van Boodle, to her "at home", to play. "You will meet a good many influential people," wrote Mrs. Van B. He went, poor fellow, having sacrificed two or three dinners to buy his gloves, new patent leather boots and irreproachable tie, and was called upon to open the musical programme. He did so cheerily and hopefully, and received his poor round of applause. He then sat down, was introduced to nobody, was never asked to play again, and had the mortification to see a mere teacher of the piano, who played detestably (but who was the private instructor of Mrs. Van Boodle herself) asked to perform in the very middle of the proceedings, when because there were more people in the room, there was naturally more applause. This is an ordinary example of "social influence". Does Mrs. Van Boodle think, I wonder, that she has assisted that young composer by asking him to perform at the very worst time of her "at home"—as far as appreciation was

concerned—introducing him to no one, placing an inferior pianist above him, and finally paying him nothing? No, Mrs. Van B., that artist has no reason whatever to be grateful to you; he simply regrets the money he spent on the new gloves and boots he bought for the occasion, and well he may, for your “influence” will never gain him the worth of them!

One more instance, though I could quote scores, and I have done. A gifted professional reciter, equal to any actress on the stage for the splendid force and fire of her delivery, was asked recently to give two recitations at the house of the Countess of Fuddlebury. She accepted with joy. She ordered an elegant dress for the occasion, and determining not to disgrace her distinguished “patrons”, she hired a brougham to take her to the countess’s house and back, saying to herself hopefully, “They will certainly give me ten guineas, they are so enormously rich, and I can surely afford ten-and-six for a brougham out of that.” So she went in proper style, gave her recitations, and was applauded as much as the Fuddlebury “set” ever does applaud—and then—what happened? The Earl of Fuddlebury gave her a half-guinea bouquet! Alone in her brougham, returning home from her poor little triumph, she feverishly searched among the flowers for the bank note which she thought might have been delicately placed there by her noble host and hostess. Alas, she quite

overrated the good intentions of the Fuddlebury folk—a bouquet presented by an earl is a sufficient reward for anybody surely! But how about the brougham? And the dress? And the bills coming in for both? Ah, poor thing, she shed many tears over her disappointment that night!

And who shall count the heart-aches, difficulties and sorrows that beset all artists in their upward climbing? sorrows that are more often increased than lightened by the selfishness and avarice of their so-called “patrons”. There is no Mæcenas nowadays to rescue the unknown Horace or Virgil who may be toiling away, on the brink of starvation, in his lonely garret. There is no great-hearted Lorenzo de Medici to foster the very earliest promises of art in the artist and encourage his budding efforts with generous praise and substantial reward. Our Prince of Wales is not particularly interested in literature and art; his efforts are principally directed to the launching of “professional beauties” on the stage where they cannot act, and where they are permitted to remain notwithstanding their incapability, to the wonder, impatience, but gradual toleration of the too good-natured British public. Plenty of money is spent in useless luxuries; there are women willing to pay fifty pounds for one dress, who would grudge five guineas to Rubinstein if he condescended to play for them privately; there are lords and dukes who will give

a thousand pounds for a horse, and yet will screw down the foreign painter who decorates their reception-rooms in superb fresco, to the uttermost farthing of meanest remuneration. But there is yet another view to be taken of the "patrons" of art as they exist in this country. Should any of the unfortunate gifted ones who have been induced to soil the wings of her genius in the miry pit-falls known as "at homes", happen to succeed at last and become famous, what a cackling chorus arises from the Fitz-foodles and Boodles and Ponsonby Tomkins folk!

"I patronized her!" cries one. "I introduced him!" says another.

"I used my best influence for him," remarks my lord with an air of wealthy satisfaction.

"Without us, she could never have succeeded!" adds my lady with a determined nod of triumphant self-elation. And so on. Without doubt, if great folks did exert properly the influence they have by reason of their wealth and station, they could do much for all who are in the various artistic professions, but here a new difficulty presents itself. Some of the richest people in the metropolis are those who have made their money in trade, *parvenus* who are as ignorant as they are rich and who are unable to distinguish between the artist and the *charlatan*. To be a worthy patron of art requires not only wealth, but intellectual culture,

refinement, delicacy, discrimination and a great love of the beautiful. All these attributes are very rarely found in the English or American millionaire, British meanness especially, in matters of art, being proverbial. John Bull likes to stand aloof with his hands in his well-filled pockets, eyeing struggling genius with a sort of languid curiosity, and saying with praiseworthy philosophy, "Help yourselves and all your friends will love you." Naturally! for in success friends are not needed. We are always so ready to love those who don't want anything from us. I know an extremely wealthy woman, conspicuous for the large diamond rings she wears on her podgy fingers and the innumerable gold and jewelled bangles wherewith she adorns her stout arms, who was recently asked to lend a very small sum of money to one who had been her playmate in early youth, a sum which would have served as a stepping stone for him to fame and fortune. The lady professed the most sentimental tenderness for her "dear, dear old friend", but hesitated about the loan.

"How *dreadful* it would be if he could not pay it back," she said with a sigh. "It will be much better not to lend it." The value of one of her costly rings or glittering bracelets might have made her old friend's career, yet she contemplated the "dreadful" possibility of his not being able to pay back her loan; she never dreamed of making him a free gift of the sum he

needed—preferring, as such fine ladies generally do prefer, the trumpery gew-gaws of personal adornment to the priceless glory of a soul's gratitude.

Are there no patrons of Art? Yes, a few, such as the King and Queen of Italy, the Emperor and Empress of Austria, and certain wealthy heads of historical houses who flourish under the rule of these Continental potentates. But in England where shall we look for them? The "patrons" of the race-course are legion; plentiful, too, are the "patrons" of burlesque opera, where dancing in tights may be carried to the utmost limits of suggestive indelicacy. There are certain bars, too, in London, presided over by advertised bar-maids, who count their "patrons" among the "nobility and gentry" by the score; but the patrons of literature, music, painting, or sculpture are few indeed. It is a hard time just now for the delicate dreams and ideals of Genius, and yet it is by Genius alone that the nation must continue to live. The names that resound to-day through the educated world are not those of wealthy merchants, brokers, traders or lofty aristocrats—they are the names of poets, historians, musicians, painters, philosophers, thinkers, they who were the very life-blood of the age in which they laboured. As some of the personages living in Dante's time are only remembered because of his power in depicting them as enduring the horrors of the "Inferno" or "Purgatorio", so it may be

that this Victorian era will some day only be thought of on account of the "Great Neglected", who may be fighting with difficulties in some obscure corner at this very moment, unrecognized by so much as a commendatory line in the daily or weekly press. Queen Elizabeth was a great personage in her time—her revels at Kenilworth were no doubt as brilliant as any attending Queen Victoria's "Jubilee"—yet she seems a shadowy and uncertain figure compared to the all-embracing existence of Shakespeare.

Therefore, though it is hard, up-hill work, dear sons and daughters of Art, let none of you despond or faint by the way. You are not so much in need of pity as are your so-called "patrons", for their eyes are blinded to all but things temporal while yours can gaze undazzled upon things eternal. For you the birds sing their secrets; for you the flowers talk; for you the clouds build fairy palaces; to you the great heart of Nature is bare as a scroll on which divine meanings are clearly inscribed. Your "patrons", most of them at least, see none of these wonders. For them the curtain is down—fortune never comes with both hands full. Where she bestows great wealth she often denies the enjoyment of true benevolence; where she gives affluence and luxury, she refuses to add with it the understanding of brotherly love and charity. Be cheerful, O artists of all grades; be brave and work on patiently; for if your re-

ward come not in this foolish brief bubble of a world, have no fear but that the Highest Patron of all—the Creator of Art and the Final Perfectioner of Beauty—will satisfy at last the unutterable longings of those among His faithful servitors, who, tried in searching fire, have *not* been found wanting.


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## THE "SLAIN" BYRON.

"It is announced," says the *Literary Gossip* of an evening contemporary, "that still another of the critics is marching out to slay the oft-slain Byron. . . . That Byron's popularity is decreasing a candid critic can hardly deny, though the fact only seems to show how fallacious is the contemporary estimate of men of genius." This, and much more from the "smart" producer of the *Literary* paragraphs, concerning one of the grandest and most inspired poets that ever gave glory to England. And it is quite true that in these latter days a most unbecoming tendency has been displayed by the Infinitely-Little class of writing men, particularly small versifiers, to depreciate the worth and cheapen the fame of the unrivalled author of *Childe Harold*. The imperishable envy of the Lesser invariably creeps out when they presume to criticise the Great, and never did Algernon Charles Swinburne (whose genius, though far from approaching that of Byron, is still of a rare quality) appear to poorer advantage than when he used his pen to wantonly attack the fame of his more imperial brother in the realms of song. But it is not with

the unspeakable petty squabbles and "subtle" critical differences of the various followers of the Semi-Obscure modern school of poetry that I have to do. I would merely point out as briefly as possible a few facts in connection with the deathless, not "slain", Byron—facts of which the larger majority of English readers seem to be lamentably ignorant.

To begin with, I am quite ready to admit that, with the characteristic ingratitude of all purely commercial nations to their best literary men, England does not, in this her Age of Mammon, know Byron or glory in him as she ought. But, is England, with all her greatness, the *only* country in the world? Surely there are a few others! And I trust it will not vex the mind or upset the literary digestion of any little aspiring modern poetling to have this knowledge gently imparted to him—namely, that in France, Italy, Spain, Austria, Russia, and Greece, Byron's reign is absolutely supreme, and on an almost equal footing with that of Shakespeare. Indeed, the French prefer him to Shakespeare—they give him a higher place of renown than their cherished De Musset; the Italians hold him dear as Petrarch or Ariosto; to the Greeks he is hero as well as bard; and along the lovely shores of the Lake of Geneva, which he has hallowed by his fiery minstrelsy, his name is the only one placed in companionship with that of Rousseau. Shelley is nowhere compared to him; Keats is almost



unknown, and the same may be said of Wordsworth and Southey. As for the modern rhymsters!—really, it is very regrettable, but the benighted Continent really knows nothing of the verse powers of Mr. Lewis Morris, *par exemple*, or Sir Edwin Arnold, or Mr. Edmund Gosse, or Alfred Austin, or Austin Dobson, or Andrew Lang, or any of this interesting, and of course immortal, group! But they have “The Isles of Greece” translated into every tongue, and many a patriot in many a land knows its glorious strophes by heart, and can recite it with such fervour as shall stir the soul of the dullest listener. Browning lies dead in Westminster Abbey; but that dreary, ancient, Dean-controlled fane was too small to hold Byron! For the largest part of the European thinking world has offered itself as his shrine; the blue bright skies of Greece, Italy, and Andalusia blend harmoniously together to form as it were a perpetual cathedral dome for his memory; the intelligent people of all art-loving lands claim some heritage in his genius.

It is no small triumph for an English-born poet to thus hold unrivalled sway over the cultured Continent of Europe—and it is no small disgrace to England’s literary critics that their pigmy hands should be the first to throw mud at his name. There is no poetry written now-a-days that can bear an instant’s comparison with Byron’s *best* work—not a line—not a verse! What “minor” or “major” poet living can be found to

match the "Storm at Night" in *Childe Harold*, and suggest such concentrated, pent-up power as is found in the closing stanza of that immortal passage?—

"Could I embody and unbosom now  
That which is most within me—could I wreak  
My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw  
Soul, heart, mind, passions, strong or weak,  
All that I would have sought and all I seek,  
Bear, know, feel and breathe—into *one* word,  
And that one word were Lightning—I would speak!  
But as it is, I live and die unheard,  
*With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword!*"

Nothing finer than this last line could be imagined to imply the impotence of even the strongest poet's soul to find expression in moments of intense fervour and feeling. Hundreds of quotations, unsurpassable for beauty, could be made from even his less refined work, most of which is purity itself compared with the pruriency of Swinburne and the novels of Emil Zola. *Manfred* is a masterpiece of mind-analysis; so is *Cain*. There is such *heart*, fire, and manly vigour even in some of the less perfect lines and stanzas, that our own hearts when not made of the stone critic stuff, respond naturally and involuntarily to the sheer *inspiration* of the man.

The metaphysical, pessimistic, passionless verse of to-day moves us not at all; we tolerate it passively; some of us yawn over it, and wonder why it was written; few of us, if any actually *love* it. But we do

*The Hired Baby, etc.*

love, we who have read for ourselves his burning verse, the "slain" Byron, who is infinitely beyond all power to *be* "slain"—we cherish his fame in spite of the little attacking pens of the period—and if narrow England cannot glory in him, wide Europe *can* and *does*!

Pity 'tis that the busy scribes who find it such a congenial task to try and cheapen a poet's reputation when he is no longer here to answer or defend the charges made against the quality of his work, do not endeavour to quash the petty envy and jealousy that can alone move them to such despicable labours, and seek to do something on a slightly higher level—something, at least, that shall entitle them to the respect, and not expose them to the scorn of those great, art-endowed, and intellectual nations with whom the name of BYRON is, and will continue to be, a lifted sign of unselfish heroism, an imperishable music; as well as a beloved and familiar household word.

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## LITERARY LONDON.

THE great metropolis! The roaring rushing riotous crowd made up of suffering men and women, who, whether young or old, rich or poor bear on their brows the marks of care—, from which none escape, no, not even little children. Glance only at the ragged boys and girls selling matches in the streets,—look at their drawn and pinched features, look at their miserable garments—their naked swollen feet—their pleading sorrowful eyes!—you cannot call them children. No! the joys of childhood are luxuries for the rich, the poor cannot afford to be young. But there are those in this cruel city of ours for whom poverty is worse than death—, I mean the struggling and deserving author, born and bred as a gentleman, who, cursed with a fatal sensitiveness of disposition, shrinks from degradation. The man who has been accustomed to a hovel from his birth, dreams not of dwelling in a palace, but he who is possessed with the terrible "*cacoethes scribendi*" has high thoughts, original ideas, grand aims mayhap—but the end thereof is the bitterness of death. It is an old story, that of disappointed literary ambition, and yet so

new is it, that were an author of even small reputation, to die in a garret of starvation there would be an outcry of astonishment and incredulity. "With his talent, if he had tried, he could surely have found employment!" Not so, gentle friends—not so, charitable readers of journals, newspapers, magazines and novels coined out of the flesh and blood of human beings;—nothing is more difficult than to find literary work in London. For every vacant post there are a hundred or more candidates, and those who write books in the expectation of being paid for them, live on a forlorn hope—for now-a-days there are wealthy scribblers who pay for the publication of their productions, whether good or otherwise—, and is not this more advantageous for the publishers? What can a man with a poetical genius do, but go and knock his dreamy head against the hard wall of the people's cynicism;—they have Tennyson, they say, what need of more poets, especially when Shakespeare's and Byron's complete works can be purchased for a shilling each. And for novels—good Lord deliver us! Have we not enough to make a fortification of three-volumed sensationals all round London if need were,—novels of all sorts,—tame novels for goody people, lascivious novels for the pretended saints of society, and slangey, horsey, novels for men who bet on a woman's "*points*" and admire the way she is "*groomed*" especially in the arrangement of her "*mane*."

Formerly the progress of the ages was marked in history by the advancement of learning and the improvement of the Arts and Sciences. Now, what are we all rushing after with every nerve strained to anguish? Money, our god; the glare of whose golden eyes drive men mad—money that can purchase anything, whether it be luxuries of life, gratification of pride and ambition, or the beauty of woman. True, it cannot of itself obtain for us one honest friend—the wealthiest of us could not purchase the life-long devotion of one faithful and loving heart—nor could we for the price of a million sterling, escape disease and death. But what of that? We dare not ask for true friendship in the face of this grinning, sneering Period; for love, bah! let boys and girls “spoon”, but let them get over their spooning as perhaps they got over the measles in infancy and then let them marry for money. And for disease and death, enemies impossible to pacify,—it is better to be a rich sufferer than a poor one, because you can have the best physician who only comes for the highest fees—and if you die, it is some consolation to know that your grand funeral will gratify your relations and enrich the undertaker! No, the joys of Mammon’s offering cannot be too highly estimated—and in the rush onward after the glittering glory, what matter if some fall and get trodden down in the mire to die. Who stops in this age of Christian charity to reach forth a helping

hand to his fellow workers? few—and those who do get laughed at for their pains.

Who are the successful authors of the day, and how have they deserved success? Far be it from me to underrate them, yet will all their names be written in immortal letters on the scroll of the Hereafter? One may ask the question without offence—let others answer it to their own hearts, and they will. Perhaps the literary genius of the nineteenth century may live with some struggling starving wretches among us, whom we scarce know the names of, if we have ever heard of them at all. Perhaps we have seen a man in a worn suit of clothes and a shabby hat, and he has been introduced to us as a writer of books—, but what his books are about, we forget. He looks untidy and we do not care much for his acquaintance. Were we to follow him to his miserable lodging, we should care still less, seeing that he has scarce the means to buy himself a day's food. Perhaps we might see him wandering alone on our great Thames Embankment, looking with dreamy eyes into the yellowish-brown water and saying to himself—"Solemn and shadowy river, how you seem to sing me to rest like the voice of my mother in olden days when she rocked me on her pure bosom. If I were to come to you as you ask me, one brief struggle, and all would be over. Glad should I be to drop the burden of existence in your waves, O my friend! Yet

no—it is thus that cowards die—and unless my brain fails me and starvation maddens me, I will perish fighting to the last.”

Hearing this, we might pity him,—but should we give him anything? No—not only for lack of thought but for something in the proud face and speaking eye that forbids the offering of alms to such as he, unless it could be done with the most consummate tact and delicacy, which would be too much trouble for us.—We would rather subscribe £50 for the conversion of a few savages to Christianity! But how astonished we should be, were we told for a certainty that this shabby, hungry chance acquaintance of ours, was a man destined to live as a shining example of genius, when we were all dead and forgotten! Yet even so it may be!

There are two sides to literary London. On the one is a small “grand stand” of successful journalists, novelists and rhymers—who have either gratified the generally vulgar tastes of the half educated mass of people—or appealed to the goose-like sentiments of young ladies who never think seriously about anything but the dress and appearance of themselves and their rivals. On the other side is a large and densely crowded plain, and there, what do we see? Genius crushed—energy misapplied, slow heart-breaking disappointment—poverty, starvation, and death. The profession of literature to any fresh aspirant may and often does

mean slow torture and final execution. Better for some such to be clowns than poets—better, far better in many cases to sell bread and beef than write books. The masses of the people do not desire instruction, they want to laugh, to sneer, to gibe like monkeys at their own images drawn for them by hydraulic pressure from the pen of an exhausted caricaturist. Unhappy, misguided yet inspired fools, who think by hard running to overtake the swift horse called Popularity! In vain—it is an untamed steed, and some riders are no sooner mounted than they are overthrown! Literature is stripped of the regal garments she wore in ancient days, and stands like an outcast in rags, with a torn veil over her face, weeping for the Past.

THE END.



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